

BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD: GABRIEL DUMONT AND MÉTIS LEADERSHIP  
(1837-1885)

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By

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## **Abstract**

Despite the fact that it has been over a century since the 1885 North-West Resistance, the Métis and their struggle for political rights remain. Kinship, diplomacy, and community continue to be contemporary issues and sources of conflict between the Métis of Saskatchewan and the Provincial and Federal Governments of Canada. This thesis is an attempt to contextualize the current situation by delivering insight into the long history of Métis activism, not just through narratives of conflict, but instead stories of family, treaty negotiations, and systems of governance.

Gabriel Dumont serves as the main focus for this study. Going beyond the battlefield of 1885, my work highlights a variety of non-violent initiatives that would shape the Canadian prairies. Through his life experience we can trace a general history of the Métis people as they transitioned from a hunting society to an agrarian community, as well as investigate specific ways the Métis attempted to counter Euro-Canadian settlement with diplomatic, rather than military initiatives. The roots of this activism have yet to be explored in any great detail, receiving little attention by scholars. Overall, this approach provides a deeper context for understanding the long and rich history of Métis cultural and political organization before 1885.

## CONTENTS

Permission to Use.....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Contents.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 Kinship: The Dumont Family.....	16
Chapter 2—Diplomacy: Treaties.....	33
Chapter 3— Community: St. Laurent de Grandin .....	50
Conclusion: More Than a Warrior.....	72
Bibliography.....	75

## Introduction

Charles Boulton and his men rode through narrow birch, poplar, and pine trees—their trunks scarred by bullet wounds from recent battles. Carefully, they walked side-by-side, looking through every bush; stopping to listen for any sound as they hunted for a man believed to be the devil—a man who was ruthless. Each man was armed; expense not spared by the Canadian Government, who gave Boulton \$20,000 to outfit his militia in their march against the Métis of Batoche.<sup>1</sup> These men had followed Boulton from Manitoba and they, like him, felt that a second chance to defeat the infamous Métis leader Louis Riel was their fate. Every rustle of a tree branch made them flinch—every shadow could be the savage they pursued. Still, although Riel presented an enticing goal, it was his military commander Gabriel Dumont who they really wanted and ultimately feared the most.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, despite the fact that Boulton and his men captured Riel with General Frederick Middleton on 15 May 1885, they continued to hunt for Dumont.

Newspaper headlines across the prairies read “Dumont’s Capture Certain” while the men continued to search.<sup>3</sup> Paranoia began to set in as stories of Dumont’s so-called savagery circulated throughout the militia. Rumours spread that Dumont had come across two of their injured men. Dumont, according to the legend, had paid no mercy and laughed as he shot one of the men in the head despite the desperate pleas to save his life.<sup>4</sup>

The ways in which these frightened, yet, determined militiamen imagined Dumont during their man-hunt have not diminished over time. Stories of his supposed savagery remain intact within the Canadian historical consciousness. His role in the 1885 North-West Resistance has become central to depictions of his character, defining him as either a savage warrior or a Métis

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Dumont Institute, “Proof of the Effects of 1885 North West Resistance,” accessed April 6, 2016, [http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/batoche/docs/proof\\_en\\_the\\_effects\\_of\\_1885\\_west.pdf](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/batoche/docs/proof_en_the_effects_of_1885_west.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Fred Middleton and G. H. Needler, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885*, University of Toronto Studies : History and Economics, v. 11 [i.e. 12] (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), 56.

<sup>3</sup> “Riel Captured!...Dumont’s Capture Certain,” *The Kingston Daily News*, May 16, 1885.

<sup>4</sup> “How Dumont Is Looked Upon by the Troops,” *Winnipeg Daily News*, May 16, 1885, 3rd edition.

military hero.<sup>5</sup> This focus on the Métis Resistance has skewed our understanding of Dumont, ignoring his numerous diplomatic initiatives before the battle that were an important part of his leadership.

The 1885 North-West Resistance was spurred into action due to the unmet requests of the Métis people to the Canadian Government for the title to the land they had settled. As Métis communities transitioned from a hunting society after the disappearance of the buffalo, to an agrarian society who used river lots, they went through societal changes that required these formerly mobile people to claim land.<sup>6</sup> The Métis realized they had no legal claim to the land (according to European laws), and so strategically tried to negotiate title from the Canadian Government before the Euro-Canadian settlers arrived, fuelled by the arrival of government surveyors to the region. This followed what had previously happened at Red River, Manitoba in 1869-70 when Riel's provisional government negotiated with the Canadian Government giving the Manitoba Métis assurances for the protection of the French language, publically-funded Roman Catholic schools, and protection of Métis' lands which included scrips that provided each Métis with 65 hectares.<sup>7</sup>

Dumont's historical significance goes beyond the battlefield of 1885. He represented his people in a variety of non-violent initiatives that would shape the Canadian prairies. Through his life experience we can trace a general history of the Métis people as they transitioned from a hunting society to an agrarian community, but also investigate specific ways the Métis attempted to counter Euro-Canadian settlement with diplomatic, rather than military, initiatives. The roots of this activism have yet to be explored in any great detail, receiving little attention by scholars. This thesis recovers this overlooked aspect of Métis history. Overall, this approach provides a deeper context for understanding the long and rich history of Métis cultural and political organization before 1885 by using Dumont as a lense to discover concepts of leadership and its connections to kinship, diplomacy and community.

### Historiography

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<sup>5</sup> Darren R. Prefontaine, *Gabriel Dumont: Li Chef Michif in Images and in Words* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011), 1-8.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, c1990.); Melanie Niemi-Bohun, "Colonial Categories and Familial Responses to Treaty and Metis Scrip Policy: The 'Edmonton and District Stragglers,' 1870-88," *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 1 (2009): 71-98, doi:10.1353/can.0.0136.

<sup>7</sup> George Francis Gillman Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (London: Longmans, Green and co, 1936), 107-25.

Despite the large amount of literature on the Métis and the 1885 Resistance; Gabriel Dumont, a prominent Métis leader, has been left largely unconsidered. While scholars have discussed this in connection with the Resistance and his role as a war hero, little has been done to contextualize Dumont's life and activism before the battle. This historiography explores the broad schools of scholarship that integrate Dumont into their narratives while simultaneously highlighting the limited and stereotypical descriptions of this key figure. Overall, it is clear that the current state of histories written about Dumont ignore his contributions as a diplomat and intellectual, as well as his status as a highly influential transnational Métis citizen ignoring the trends in Métis studies to look beyond the battles for greater understanding.

Often Métis individuals are overlooked in order to establish a historiography on the community as a whole. The Red River community has garnered the most attention. Alexander Ross's *The Red River Settlement*, published in 1856, attempted to describe the founding of the settlement starting with Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk's, founding of the colony in what would become Manitoba. Ross developed a history of the area, taking an anthropological approach as he lived within the colony while developing this book. Ross covered a broad range of topics from the importation of cattle, the Red River windmill, to the 'Half-breeds' of both French and English descent.<sup>8</sup> Due to the background of the author and the period in which he wrote, the colonial assumption of cultural superiority is evident throughout this monograph from his remarks on the land being "untouched," except for "savages," to the chapter on civilization through Christianization.<sup>9</sup> This book, as well as Ross's other writings, became foundational sources for subsequent writers on the Métis.

Marcel Giraud, a French ethnographer and historian, used a similar approach to Ross when he tackled the topic of the Métis in the 1930s. Giraud spent weeks with the Métis in the Canadian West to research his multi-volume work, *Les Métis Canadien (The Métis in the Canadian West)*, which was published in 1945 in French and then translated in 1986 into English. Giraud used Ross as a primary source supplemented by an expansive collection of archival sources to create a detailed history of the Métis on the Canadian Prairies. Like Ross, his western European perspective is clear— with a biased and colonial view of the Métis people. Giraud

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander Ross, *The Red River Settlement: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State, with Some Account of the Native Races and Its General History to the Present Day* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1856), <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/qPy5X>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3.



viewed the Métis as more civilized than the First Nations groups he encountered, while also taking the stance that intervention of ‘white’ ways was needed to ensure the Métis’ proper civilization.<sup>10</sup> Also published in the first half of the twentieth century was the life story of Norbert Welsh, a Métis buffalo hunter. Mary Weekes worked with Norbert Welsh to record, transcribe, and publish Welsh’s life story. *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, originally published as a serial special in the Canadian magazine *Macleans*, offers a first person account of the buffalo hunt and life as a Métis on the prairie. The original publication of this story in *Macleans* was one of the first attempts for public history on the Métis.<sup>11</sup>

While early twentieth-century scholarship focused on an anthropological or ethnographic approach viewed the Métis as the ‘other,’ the mid-twentieth century saw a shift towards social history and the political movements of Aboriginal groups and activism. A surge of Métis scholarship that worked towards establishing a history grounded in political and legal activism developed during this period. For instance, the Manitoba Métis Federation published *Riverlots and Scrip: Elements of Métis Aboriginal Rights* in 1978. This book argues that although the federal government failed to adopt a neutral and fair approach to land allocations, it was clear that the Métis did not ever relinquish their Aboriginal rights.<sup>12</sup>

Bruce Sealey, also working for the Manitoba Métis Federation, produced *Stories of the Métis*, a collection of oral testimonies from Elders in the community. This book showcases the move not only to produce research by Aboriginal academics, but also a move to record and transmit the history of the Métis in their own words.<sup>13</sup> Sealey followed this publication with a monograph that traced the history of the Métis to the time of publication.<sup>14</sup>

As the twentieth-century came to a close, most Métis scholars shifted away from political issues and began to emphasize Métis culture. Diane Payment, for instance, focuses on the Métis in Saskatchewan, particularly on the community at Batoche. Her books *Li Gens Libres* as well as

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<sup>10</sup> Marcel Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West*, trans. George Woodcock, Aboriginal Education Collection (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Norbert Welsh and Mary Weekes, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Manitoba Métis Federation, *Riverlots and Scrip: Elements of Métis Aboriginal Rights*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Metis Federation, 1978), 47.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Sealey, ed., *Stories of the Metis* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Metis Federation, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> D.B. Sealey and A.S. Lussier, *The Métis, Canada's Forgotten People* (Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1975), <https://books.google.ca/books?id=9Jl0AAAAMAAJ>.

*Batoche (1870-1910)* merge English and French scholarship on the Métis.<sup>15</sup> Historian Brenda Macdougall's *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* focuses on the family structure of the Saskatchewan area Métis. Macdougall examines the concept and effects of *wahkootowin*, the act of being related to one another, on the Métis socio-cultural history. She analyzed the Métis' emergence and their interactions with other families in the area. She applied the technique of social history to genealogical data as well as historical geography.<sup>16</sup> For example in her chapter, "Rooted in Mobility," she tracks the buffalo hunting brigades by utilizing mapping techniques.<sup>17</sup> Cheryl Troupe's Master's Thesis (2009) also merges geographic and social history, bringing a greater understanding of the role of women within the Métis Saskatchewan society. Her thesis explores the social structure, urbanization, and political activism of Métis women from the mid-nineteenth century through 1980.

Martha Harroun Foster's *We Know Who We Are* is also part of this trend. Her book provides a greater understanding of Métis identity and culture by focusing on women of the Montana Métis community. Foster's focus on Montana includes the history of the Métis of Saskatchewan and their interactions with their "American" kin, thereby demonstrating the true transnational identity of the Métis in the West. Like Macdougall and Troupe, Foster also uses genealogy and census information to recreate and understand the Métis' economic, political and familial structure.<sup>18</sup>

*Métis in Canada: History, Identity, Law & Politics* (2013) is a collection of articles which brings together the current scholarship trends on Métis politics and culture. Though the articles reveal various approaches and conceptualizations of "Métis," each author maintains a common goal of a deeper understanding of the nuances of what being Métis means across North America. The authors do not hesitate to discuss difficult questions including the definition of Métis. The collection, inspired by the court decision *R. vs Powley* regarding the hunting rights of Métis, aims

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<sup>15</sup> Diane Payment, *Batoche (1870-1910)*, Collection Soleil (Saint-Boniface, Man: Editions du Blé, 1983); Diane P. Payment, *The Free People = Li Gens Libres : A History of the Métis Community of Batoche, Saskatchewan*, Rev. and expanded.. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>17</sup> Brenda Macdougall and Nicole St-Onge, "Rooted in Mobility: Metis Buffalo-Hunting Brigades," *Manitoba History*, no. 71 (2013): 21+.

<sup>18</sup> Martha Harroun Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

to produce a greater understanding of Métis Aboriginal rights as declared by that decision.<sup>19</sup> This shift to a Métis centered voice has allowed a better understanding in the legal and political process of self-determination, while moving away from the colonial views of the Métis that previous accounts held.<sup>20</sup>

Discussion on Métis scholarship, and of Gabriel Dumont, cannot ignore the subject of the North-West Resistance.<sup>21</sup> The North-West Resistance was followed by publications of first hand accounts of the military members involved immediately after the events in 1885. General Middleton's *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada 1885* was published in 1886; Charles Boulton's *Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellions* was also published the same year.<sup>22</sup> Charles Mulvany's *History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885* was also published within months of the Resistance. Mulvany used oral interviews from the troops involved, as well as government papers to create this rushed publication on the events.<sup>23</sup> The quick publishing of these memoirs and histories of the Resistance can be seen as a public relations effort on part of the Canadian Government. These publications, using only Canadian Government sources (both military or government) told only one side of the Resistance. Given the public interest in the Riel trial and execution it is easy to understand why the government was eager to support the publishing books that justified their actions at Batoche. It is interesting to note that all of these monographs were also re-published in the mid-twentieth century; as the rise of Aboriginal scholarship grew in Canada, so did the re-publishing of these monographs.

The middle of the twentieth-century brought a renewed interest in the 1885 Resistance. Not only did this include the republishing of the earlier accounts, but also fresh looks at the events of the 1885 Resistance and their causes. The new scholarship revisited the original

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher Adams, Ian Peach, and Gregg Dahl, eds., *Métis in Canada: History, Identity, Law & Politics*, 1st ed (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> More information on Socio-Economic approaches to Métis society can be found in Gerhard John Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Brenda Macdougall and Nicole St-Onge, "Rooted in Mobility: Metis Buffalo-Hunting Brigades," *Manitoba History*, no. 71 (2013): 21+; NICOLE ST-ONGE, *Saint-Laurent, Manitoba: Evolving Métis Identities, 1850-1914*, edition (University of Regina Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Currently referred to as the Resistance, the events surrounding Batoche in 1885 were often referred to as a Rebellion until the latter half of the twentieth century.

<sup>22</sup> Originally published in 1886, both of these accounts were republished in additional forms in the mid-1980s. Charles Arkoll Boulton, *I Fought Riel: A Military Memoir*, 2nd ed., Bonnycastle, R. H. G. (Richard Henry Gardyne), 1903-1968. Richard Bonnycastle Book ; 3 (Toronto: Lorimer, 1985); Fred Middleton and G. H. Needler, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885*, University of Toronto Studies : History and Economics, v. 11 [i.e. 12] (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948).

<sup>23</sup> Charles Pelham Mulvany, *The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: A.H. Hovey, 1885).

sources, including archival sources, but approached the topic through new lenses such as military and Indigenous views of the events. Desmond Morton's *The Last War Drum*, published on behalf of the Canadian War Museum, focuses on the military campaigns of the Resistance. Morton characterizes the 1885 Resistance as the last war within Canada, but also the first situation in which Canadians gained practical experience and self-confidence for military movements. This monograph describes the Resistance not only as a nation-building event, but also as a military-building event for the country.<sup>24</sup>

At this time, possibly due to a rise of Indigenous activism, scholars began to take a more critical view of the Resistance. On behalf of the *Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research*, Donald George Mclean took a critical look at the causes of the 1885 Resistance.<sup>25</sup> He depicted the Resistance not as a response to the requests of the Métis but instead a military movement spurred by the Government as a nation-building event. This monograph follows the rise of researchers taking a critical look at previous topics and attempts to bring the Indigenous voice into the scholarship, as well as shifting increased blame for the Resistance to the Canadian Government, specifically Prime Minister MacDonald.<sup>26</sup> Also following this trend, scholars gave increased attention on Riel himself. Although at first glance this appears to be a move away from the government's version of the events, this attention on Riel maintains a focus on a late coming actor to Métis activism in the Batoche area and not the community as a whole.

By the end of the twentieth-century scholars had taken a broader approach to the Resistance, investigating other actors involved. In 1999 Bob Beal and Rod Macleod published *Prairie Fire*, which examined the broader context including the settlers and farmers who were already in the area, as well as the Métis side of the Resistance.<sup>27</sup> One of the most recent works, Bill Waiser and Blaire Stonechild's *Loyal Until Death* (2010), argues that the First Nations groups accused of supporting the Resistance were not willing actors. This monograph blames the

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<sup>24</sup> Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum; the North West Campaign of 1885*, Canadian War Museum. Historical Publications, no. 5 (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972).

<sup>25</sup> Donald George Mclean, *1885, Metis Rebellion or Government Conspiracy?*, Irene M. Spry Collection of Western Canadian History (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1985), 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> Bob Beal and R. C. Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 Northwest Rebellion*, First Edition edition (Edmonton: McClelland & Stewart, 1999).

Métis and claims they used the First Nations as scapegoats in their own attempts to escape persecution.<sup>28</sup>

Although Dumont's role in the 1885 North-West Resistance was equally important, especially in comparison to Louis Riel, scholars have mostly ignored him. Publications on the Resistance give Dumont no more than a mention. Dumont's place in history, as told by these authors, is relegated to second in command to Riel as military commander. Marcel Giraud refers to Dumont several times in his volumes, as the "leader of the hunt" and as one of the new names associated with the St. Laurent Provisional Government.<sup>29</sup> These mentions are brief, and give no great detail into Dumont's diplomacy or leadership.

Negative attributes have also often been associated with Dumont. George Stanley wrote that Dumont was a "known leader, head of the settlement, but lacking the qualities required in rhetoric to be a political leader."<sup>30</sup> Dumont was illiterate<sup>31</sup> (as opposed to Riel who attended school in Montreal) and left few written records of his point of view on events. This may account for the lack of attention on him in comparison to Riel. Currently, only two memoirs of Dumont's have been published, compared to the vast volumes of diaries, letters, and a trial transcripts regarding Riel.<sup>32</sup>

1975 signifies the greatest change in the historiography of Dumont with the publication of George Woodcock's *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*. This biographic approach to Dumont demonstrates that Woodcock seems to think highly of Dumont; he opens the introduction "Gabriel Dumont has gone almost uncelebrated, as a follower of Riel, as a kind of bluff, sturdy Sancho Panza to the Canadian Don Quixote, and although he was in his own right a man of great interest and appeal."<sup>33</sup> Woodcock was the first to question why Riel captured the public's attention when Dumont in his opinion personified the Métis people.<sup>34</sup> Woodcock began the monograph after he was commissioned to write a radio play featuring both Riel and Dumont.

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<sup>28</sup> Bill Waiser and Blair Stonechild, *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Markham, Ont: Fifth House Books, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West*, 399, 401.

<sup>30</sup> Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*, 261.

<sup>31</sup> Kerr states that Gabriel "had a remarkable memory, and could read and write in French" so could his brothers Eli... and Edouard." This counters the regular scholarship that Gabriel was illiterate. John Andrew Kerr, "Gabriel Dumont: A Personal Memory," *Dalhousie Review* 15 (36 1935): 54.

<sup>32</sup> Gabriel Dumont, "Gabriel Dumont's Account of the North West Rebellion, 1885," trans. George F.G. Stanley, *The Canadian Historical Review* 30, no. 3 (1949): 249-69, doi:10.3138/CHR-030-03-03.

<sup>33</sup> George Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, 1st paperback ed.. (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1976), 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

It was during this research that he noticed that the number of publications on Riel greatly outnumbered those on Dumont.<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that Woodcock's personal political stance, as an anarchist, may have helped him empathize with Dumont who Woodcock perceives as working outside of the Government's reach.<sup>36</sup> Woodcock is the first to place Dumont as a central figure throughout the Resistance. The monograph follows Dumont's life from his early years, through the resistance, to his death in 1906. Woodcock allows Dumont to step out of Riel's shadow and hold his own place in Métis history. Even now, Woodcock's closing words on Dumont ring true, that when he died no one remarked of his passing; that "he was not thought of by the world because the world did not know of him."<sup>37</sup> Although Woodcock's book remains indispensable, it is not without problems. His lack of citations and short bibliographic acknowledgements make Woodcock's sources and the interpretations of them difficult to confirm.

Scholarly work in English on Dumont after Woodcock's monograph is scarce. In 2011, Darren Préfontaine, with the Gabriel Dumont Institute, published *Gabriel Dumont: Li Chif Michif*. This is a coffee-book style publication that collects and reproduces the majority of archival and cultural representations of Dumont. Préfontaine's short introduction, which includes a historiographical overview of the works on Dumont to this point, emphasizes the lack of academic work on Dumont. Préfontaine only analyzes the English works on Dumont and includes the numerous public histories as well as Woodcock's book.<sup>38</sup> There has only been one scholarly work focused on Dumont in English since the publication of Préfontaine's book. Matthew Barret's article "Hero of the Half-Breed Rebellion: Gabriel Dumont and Late Victorian Military Masculinity" (2014), argues that Dumont represented the rugged masculinity that Victorian British Empire was trying to instil in the young men of the time, and that though not white, the Empire recognized Dumont as an representation of the military ideal. However, Barret concludes that this image also served to separate Dumont from the political issues at hand by seeing him only in the realm of military masculinity.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>36</sup> Allan Antliff and Matthew S. Adams, "George Woodcock's Transatlantic Anarchism," *Anarchist Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015): 6+.

<sup>37</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont : The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, 251.

<sup>38</sup> Darren R. Préfontaine, *Gabriel Dumont : Li Chef Michif in Images and in Words* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011), 1-8.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew Barret, "Hero of the Half-Breed Rebellion: Gabriel Dumont and Late Victorian Military Masculinity," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue D'études Canadiennes* 48, no. 3 (2014): 79-107.

Publications in French have contributed greatly to the work done on Dumont. Denis Combet and Lisé Gaboury-Diallo produced the first academic translation of Dumont's second transcribed memoirs.<sup>40</sup> The annotated translation is produced in both French and English and will be of importance to any future scholars working on Dumont. Both Combet and Gabour-Diallo, French professors at Université de Saint-Boniface and University of Brandon, have continued to publish on Dumont. Combet produced a monograph that melds together the translation of Dumont's memoirs, previously unpublished letters, and additional primary sources to create a narrative of Dumont during the Resistance and the years after.<sup>41</sup> Gaboury-Diallo published a short comparative of Dumont's two accounts of the Resistance.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that these works, combined with the 2006 conference at the Université de Saint-Boniface in Dumont's memory, showcase that Dumont is still a person of strong connection not just with the Métis, but also with French-Canadians.

It is impossible to discuss Dumont without acknowledging numerous public and popular histories. From the 1968 booklet by Sandra McKee *Gabriel Dumont: Indian Fighter*, aimed at children, to Joseph Boyden's 2010 *Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont*. The portrayals of Dumont have adjusted as the opinion of Métis and the Resistance have altered. McKee's highly stereotyped envisioning of Dumont as a warrior out for blood shows a stark difference in interpretation of Dumont in comparison to Boyden's description of him as an intellectual comparable to Riel.<sup>43</sup> Jordan Zinovich's *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, develops a narrative based on the rumours that Dumont visited Paris to continue speaking on behalf of the Métis after the Resistance.<sup>44</sup> These popular accounts of Dumont demonstrate that he continues to hold the attention of Canadians and Métis as a symbol of freedom, strength, and excitement.

This thesis acknowledges the popular, while still scant, work on Dumont's life in both academic and public realms and seeks to build on this research. Combined, these works have developed a good understanding of Métis society in the eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries, and

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<sup>40</sup> Gabriel Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, Mémoires: les Mémoires dictés par Gabriel Dumont et le Récit Gabriel Dumont*, ed. Denis P. Combet, trans. Lise Gaboury-Diallo (Saint-Boniface, Man: Éditions du Blé, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Denis P. Combet, Ismène Toussaint, and Gabriel Dumont, eds., *Gabriel Dumont: Souvenirs de Résistance D'un Immortel del'Ouest* (Québec: Cornac, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Lise Gaboury-Diallo, "Batoche selon Gabriel Dumont: une étude de l'historicité de ses mémoires," in *L'ouest: Directions, dimensions et destinations* (Winnipeg Manitoba: Presses Universitaires de Saint-Boniface, 2005), 99–114.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Boyden, *Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont* (Toronto: Penguin Group Canada, 2010); Sandra Lynn McKee, ed., *Gabriel Dumont: Indian Fighter* (Saskatoon, SK: Frank WAnderson, 1968).

<sup>44</sup> Jordan Zinovich, *Gabriel Dumont in Paris: A Novel History* (University of Alberta, 1999).

laid the foundation for understanding Dumont's contribution to the Resistance, as well as Métis and Saskatchewan history. My research, therefore, expands on these trends and delivers a broader and more complicated rendering of Dumont and his family before the battlefield of the 1885 Resistance, demonstrating that Dumont's leadership, and as such leadership in Métis society during this period, was connected with kinship, diplomacy and community.

#### Research Questions and Chapter Overview

My primary research question asks— who was Gabriel Dumont and how should he be remembered? More specific questions include: how did Dumont's kinship ties affect his leadership? How did he influence his local community? And what was his role in Métis society? This is answered by an exploration of Dumont's life through the prisms of kinship, diplomacy and community before the 1885 North-West Resistance.

Chapter 1: Kinship- examines Dumont's family history and kinship network. Details about his ancestors, siblings and wife are explored to help gain a greater understanding not only how Dumont became a leader in his community but also how kinship and leadership informed Métis leadership in the nineteenth century. Taken as a whole this research demonstrates that the Dumont family embraced the Métis concept of *wahkootowin* for generations, while strategically situating their descendants in positions of leadership to maintain their influence throughout nineteenth-century Métis society illustrating the connections between kinship and leadership.

Chapters 2: Diplomacy - analyzes key diplomatic events in which Dumont, along with other Dumont family members, played diplomatic roles. The Treaty between the Métis and the Dakota Sioux in 1862 helped establish several aspects of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Western Canada and demonstrates the international politics at play during the period. Dumont also participated in other diplomatic events, including the negotiations of Treaty 6 (1876). In both cases, although there has been substantial research on these treaties, Dumont's role is one that has not been examined in detail, as this diplomatic role does not play into the military image scholars have previously privileged. This indicates that diplomacy was a vital part of Métis leadership in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Finally, Chapter 3: Community - investigates the one area of Dumont's life that has garnered some attention—his involvement in the Métis community of St. Laurent de Grandin (1873). Scholarship on Dumont's life tends to mention such participation, but often only in a cursory way. In reality, Dumont held significant positions of power within the community.



Taking this into consideration along with the pre-established social and political structures of the buffalo<sup>45</sup> hunt, this chapter counters the common belief that the St. Laurent governmental structure reflected a Euro-Canadian model, and was the result of a deep-rooted buffalo hunt system of governance. This adaptation of the buffalo-hunt governance to the newly established settlement of St. Laurent demonstrates how the leaders of Métis communities took long-standing traditions and adapted them to the needs of the community showing that community was an important component to Métis leadership.

### Methodology:

This project is part of a larger effort to decolonize North American history. For too long, stories of Indigenous leaders have centred on the warrior image, and Dumont's life portrayal is no exception. My research, following in the footsteps of the scholars who have challenged this norm, looks at Dumont's life as a diplomat and leader of the Métis people rather than a warrior. This thesis draws on the methodologies of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*, ensuring that "the significance of Indigenous perspective" is represented.<sup>46</sup> Smith discusses the importance of critical reading of Western history sources to bring the Indigenous voices out of these sources where the authors had attempted to mute them.<sup>47</sup> This critical reading will be an analytical method for the use of any of the earlier secondary sources such as Begg, Stanley, and Giraud's writings from the first half of the twentieth century. These sources, though expansive and rich with information on the Métis people of the North-West, are biased due to an assumption of cultural superiority—a careful and critical reading and analysis will help bring out the Indigenous voice from these monographs.

New Biography is recognized as a form of effective decolonizing methodology as the historian connects and contextualizes the individual to larger societal trends.<sup>48</sup> Historian Daniel Richter argues that it "is much easier to reconstruct the abstract forces that constrained ... the Native world than it is to recover the personal experiences of the people who struggled to give the

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<sup>45</sup> Although Bison is the correct term for this animal, historical documents and the Métis people of the time used the term buffalo and as such this term will be used throughout this thesis.

<sup>46</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>48</sup> Nick Salvatore, "Biography and Social History: An Intimate Relationship," *Labour History*, no. 87 (November 1, 2004): 190, doi:10.2307/27516005.

world human shape.”<sup>49</sup> New Biography as a methodology has recently gained traction within Métis studies finding its roots in social history, moving away from the traditional chronological approaches to biography but instead using an individual to demonstrate trends within a community. Historian Doris Jeanne Mackinnon’s monograph *The Identities of Marie Rose Delorme Smith: portrait of a Métis woman, 1861-1960*, for instance, approaches Métis society through the transitional period by exploring the life of the Métis woman Marie Smith. Mackinnon notes “[i]n the scholarship to date, one major aspect of Métis identity that remains largely unexamined is the question of the identity of Métis people on an individual basis[.]”<sup>50</sup> Dumont’s identity, through the work of mostly non-Aboriginal scholars in the twentieth-century, has focused on his role as a military and “savage” warrior. Though occasionally authors have given a nod to his intelligence, it is always within his military prowess and the narrative of the 1885 Resistance.<sup>51</sup> This focus on the Resistance is inherently colonial as it implies that the only period of Dumont’s life worth noting was his interaction with Euro-Canadians.<sup>52</sup> In addition, it further ignores the complex processes taking place within Métis society that led to the conflict. Dumont lived during a critical period of Métis history in the North-West, witnessing the transition from a hunting society to an agrarian lifestyle on settled plots and fights for political recognition/sovereignty. It was through this period of transformation that Dumont became a voice for his community. He was heavily involved as a leader of the buffalo hunt, and then became a founding member of the St. Laurent community. Through a biographical lens, I will explore not only Dumont, but also the larger aspects of kinship, diplomacy, and community.

The framework for this thesis focuses on the Métis territories that stretched across the prairies of modern day Canada and the United States. The Métis had a vast homeland due to their

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<sup>49</sup> Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*, 2003, 69.

<sup>50</sup> Doris Jeanne MacKinnon, *The Identities of Marie Rose Delorme Smith: Portrait of a Métis Woman, 1861-1960* (Regina: CPRC Press, 2012), 4, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usask/detail.action?docID=3281350>.

<sup>51</sup> Woodcock is the first to establish Dumont as a person who had some agency within the Resistance. However, he still focuses upon Dumont in the Resistance narrative, focusing on the Resistance for the majority of the monograph. George Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont : The Métis Chief and His Lost World*. (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1976).

<sup>52</sup> Works with similar approaches can be found in: Donald Bibeau, “Fur Trade Literature from a Tribal Point of View: A Critique,” in *Rethinking the Fur Trade: Cultures of Exchange in an Atlantic World*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 443-80; D. Peter MacLeod, “The Anishinabeg Point of View: The History of the Great Lakes Region to 1800 in Nineteenth - Century Mississauga, Odawa, and Ojibwa Historiography,” *Canadian Historical Review*, April 18, 2008, doi:10.3138/CHR-073-02-03.

mobility as buffalo hunters.<sup>53</sup> Focusing on the Dumont family and the kinship connections this thesis concentrates on the central prairies of modern-day Alberta and Saskatchewan as well as the other side of the Medicine Line into modern United States including families from as far east as Mackinac Island.

### Sources

This thesis is based primarily on archival research. The Glenbow Museum, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Hudson Bay Company Archives, and Archives at Saint-Boniface are the primary repositories for these sources. Chapter one relies on the genealogical records found in the Charles Denney fonds, George Burtenshaw fonds as well as the Gail Morin database at the Glenbow Archives. These sources, along with John Kerr's memories as recorded in his biography are used to determine the kinship ties between Dumont's family and leadership.

Chapter two and its exploration of the 1862 Treaty with the Dakota Sioux uses an obscure oral history that was recorded by Gregoire Monette, the grandson of Jean-Baptiste Wilkie. This source has not been used in scholarship on Dumont and gives new insight into Dumont's important role in this treaty. This source, as well as Dumont's own memoirs, and other witnesses such as John Kerr, help explore Dumont's role as a diplomat in both the 1862 treaty and Treaty 6.

Chapter three focuses on the written histories surrounding the establishment of St. Laurent de Grandin. The missionary record, written by Father André, *Petite Chronique de St. Laurent*, brings insight into the establishment of the community as well as Dumont's role as President for the years preceding the 1885 Resistance. This French source has rarely been used, as scholars tend to focus on St. Laurent minimally when investigating the events leading to the 1885 Resistance. This chapter also draws upon numerous petitions written by the Métis (of what would become modern Saskatchewan) to the Crown requesting land and aid. To date, this rich collection has only been used by in a superficial exploration while covering the events leading to the 1885 Resistance such as the two pages devoted to the petitions and their response by Beal and Macleod.<sup>54</sup> These petitions give insight into the willingness the Métis demonstrated to work with the federal agents as well as the connection the Dumont family had with several communities throughout the prairies.

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<sup>53</sup> Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall, *Contours of a People Metis Family, Mobility, and History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3571331>; Macdougall and St-Onge, "Rooted in Mobility."

<sup>54</sup> Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 44–45.

## Terminology

Words have power, and I have made conscious decisions around the terminology used within this thesis and these deserve some explanation. The term “Métis” is used in the Canadian Constitution (1982) to refer to a community of people who have ancestral ties to the historic Métis community, self-identify as Métis and are accepted as such by the modern Métis community. However, this definition is not accepted by all of the scholars of Métis studies. This thesis will follow these scholars’ lead and refer to Métis when referencing those with First Nations and European ancestry and ties to the historic Métis homeland (Red River area) who identified and shared a Métis culture. Meanwhile those who had mixed descent but did not share in this culture and identity will be referred to as métis acknowledging their ethnic roots.<sup>55</sup>

When possible I use more specific terminology such as “Dakota Sioux” to represent specific groups. To signify greater movements that extend beyond communities or borders I will use the term Indigenous.

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that it has been over a century since the 1885 North-West Resistance, the Métis and their struggle for political rights remain. Kinship, diplomacy, and community continue to be contemporary issues and sources of conflict between the Métis of Saskatchewan and the Provincial and Federal Governments of Canada.<sup>56</sup> My research is an attempt to contextualize the current situation by delivering insight into the long history of Métis activism, not just through narratives of conflict, but instead, stories of family, treaties, governments and diplomacy. In this way, a study of Gabriel Dumont before the 1885 battle complicates the militia men’s “savage” and “hero” legends of the past, revealing the complex and diverse nature of nineteenth-century Métis society and the cultural pre-cursors for Métis activism today.

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<sup>55</sup> A good discussion on the use of Métis and métis can be found in Chris Andersen, *Metis: Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> “Grassroots Leadership Calling for a General Assembly to Save Métis Nation Saskatchewan | News Talk 650 CKOM,” accessed September 27, 2015, <http://ckom.com/article/216593/grassroots-leadership-calling-general-assembly-save-m-tis-nation-saskatchewan>.

## Chapter One: Generations

In 1790 a young francophone man left his life in Montreal and headed west to begin a new adventure. First, he moved towards the Great Lakes and the *Pays-d'en-haut*<sup>57</sup> as a fur trader. Three years later he went farther west into the Saskatchewan Valley to work as a freeman for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) at Fort Edmonton, as well as other HBC posts. Jean-Baptiste Dumont, like many other fur traders, became intimately involved with his Indigenous neighbours creating economic and personal relationships.<sup>58</sup> It was not long after, and due to this kind of habitual networking, that Dumont met and married a Sarcee woman named Josephte in 1794. This union set the stage for future generations of Dumont descendants and created one of the most well-known families of the Métis Nation— their sons and grandsons making their way into history books as great leaders throughout the prairies. This chapter outlines the ancestral legacy of Jean-Baptiste and Josephte, tracing and connecting the ties between systems of kinship and leadership. Taken as a whole, information about Dumont men and women, as well as their marriages and children, will demonstrate how this family strategically situated their descendants in positions of leadership to maintain their influence throughout nineteenth-century Métis society. Underscoring this process was the concept of *wahkootowin*<sup>59</sup>, a unique Indigenous approach to creating and maintaining relationships steeped in Métis worldviews.

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<sup>57</sup> Pay d'en haut was the territory west of Montreal encompassing the Great Lakes and west; overall it was used as a term to cover the areas that the voyageurs travelled to trade including into the prairies. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, 2011, xii.

<sup>58</sup> Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that Macdougall uses the Cree term to represent several Indigenous terms for this concept, and that this term itself does not exist in Michif, the Métis language. Some Métis community members have issues with this term, but I believe that Dumont's family demonstrates this concept as described by Macdougall and follow her lead in its use due to the many similarities found between the Dumont family and the trends in which her book explores.

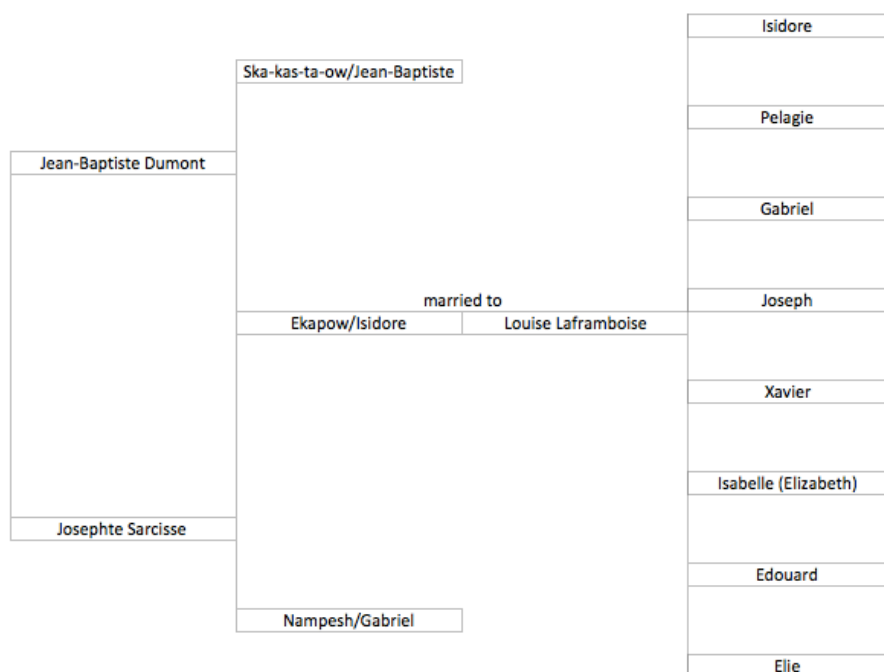


Fig.1 Simplified Family Tree Dumont Family

## First Generation

Little information is known about Jean-Baptiste. However, records compiled by genealogists, based on Hudson Bay Company records as well as the Oblate archives, tell us he met and married Josephpte (Josette) Sarcisse<sup>60</sup>—

a Sarcee woman. Josephpte had already been living with a man named Bruneau and had one child when she began a relationship with Jean-Baptiste.<sup>61</sup> The Sarcee First Nation were allies of the Blackfoot Confederacy and had connections, like many First Nations of the time, with the fur trade. The fur trade was dependent on these relationships with the local First Nations and many marriages resulted between these two groups, forging alliances and creating kinship ties.<sup>62</sup> The

<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that many names used in this thesis have numerous spellings, as often the names were spelled based on pronunciation. When possible I will give the several versions in first use in brackets and then continue with one version of spelling. Because of the two names used for this first generation of the family, and repeated use of names in later generations I will use the Aboriginal based names, as this is what records show these men as being called by their family and friends and to help clarify from the younger generations who went by the English/Catholic names.

<sup>61</sup> Roderick Macleod, "Dumont, Gabriel," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13 (Toronto: University of Toronto/Universite Laval, 1994).

<sup>62</sup> Susan Sleeper-Smith, "Women, Kin, and Catholicism: New Perspectives on the Fur Trade," in *Rethinking the Fur Trade: Cultures of Exchange in an Atlantic World*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 443–80; Brown, Jennifer S. H., "Woman as Centre and Symbol in the Emergence of Metis Communities," in *Rethinking the Fur Trade: Cultures of Exchange in an Atlantic World*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 519–28; Sylvia Van Kirk, "'The Custom of the Country': An

couple had three sons and two daughters: Gabriel (Nampesh/Iacaste), Isidore (Ekapow), and Jean-Baptiste (Ska-kas-ta-ow/Chakasta), and daughters Suzanne and Cecile.<sup>63</sup> Oblate records state that the youngest son Ska-kas-ta-ow was adopted, but all documents indicate they treated him like any of the other children.<sup>64</sup> Together the couple settled in the Saskatchewan Valley, a territory that would become integral to the Métis homeland. They spent the majority of their lives camping, hunting, and raising their family amongst other relatives. In 1850 Jean-Baptiste was laid to rest in the prairie plains. With his passing, Josephthe moved eastward to St. Boniface (near Winnipeg, Manitoba) with one of her daughters in the 1850s and stayed there until her death.<sup>65</sup> Although we know little about this first generation of Dumont leaders, we can surmise that their involvement in the fur trade, as well as their decision to live among relatives and remain within the growing Métis territorial space of power on the prairies would have demonstrated the values and culture of their community to their children.

*Wahkootowin*, a Cree term meaning “to belong to one another,” or “relationship” describes the way that many Aboriginal peoples on the plains interacted between relatives and non-relatives. This Cree word demonstrates much more than a relationship but a worldview based on familial connectedness conveying the virtues that an individual should personify as a family member.<sup>66</sup> They placed community above the individual, and this directed their actions and behaviours. Thus, the relationships forged within this first generation highlights the beginning of *wahkootwin* practices within the Dumont family.

## Second Generation

Most of the Dumont children remained in the territory of their youth, while the oldest son – Nampesh – decided to move farther west as a young teenager. Records indicate, for instance, that this six-foot Métis man was at the HBC fur trade post at Rocky Mountain House as early as

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Examination of Fur Trade Marriage Practices,” in *Rethinking the Fur Trade: Cultures of Exchange in an Atlantic World*, ed. Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 481–518.

<sup>63</sup> It is important to note that the girls born out of this relationship are only referred to in records by Christian names. This may imply that the boys born to the family maintained connections and identity with the Sarcee side of their family and more so than the women. Gail Morin, “Descendancy Chart Jean Baptiste Dumont-3693,” n.d., Gail Morin Genealogy Database, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>64</sup> Rev Dubue, “Letter from Reverend Dubue,” unknown, Charles Denney Fonds, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Josephthe’s date of death is unknown as the records were destroyed in a fire in 1860. We do know that oral stories place her moving with her daughter and death during the decade of the 1840s, but this disagrees with the accepted date of Jean-Baptiste’s death of 1850, as it would make sense for her to remain with him until his death and then move with her daughter. Thus I have placed her moving with her daughter in the 1850s

<sup>66</sup> Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 8.

1810-1811, when he would have been only fifteen years old.<sup>67</sup> Both the Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company established rival posts at Rocky Mountain House in 1799 at the end of the North Saskatchewan River. These popular posts essentially marked the end of the fur trade line, and approximately nine Aboriginal groups used the two posts for trade.<sup>68</sup> In 1824, Nampesh moved to Lac Ste. Anne (near Edmonton, Alberta). Lac Ste. Anne, previously known as Manito-Sakahigan in Cree, was already an established area of Métis settlement. Nampesh accompanied his friend and missionary, Father Jean-Baptiste (Abé) Thibault to the area in 1841 and founded the mission at Lac Ste. Anne at that time. In 1842 Thibault sanctified the Christian marriage of Nampesh to Suzanne Lucier (Lussier), daughter of Francois Lucier and a Métis woman Louise Bruneau.<sup>69</sup> They had several children, although the numbers vary within the documents. Some accounts say that there were six children, with the eldest born before 1825 near Edmonton.<sup>70</sup> It is possible that the couple were intimately involved before 1825 and had a “country marriage”<sup>71</sup> resulting in this son. It is also possible that the eldest son was adopted or the biological son of only one of the parents, especially since records indicate that Suzanne was involved with another man, Francis Bouvette, previously. Nineteenth-century Métis communities tended to de-emphasize direct genetic lineage, and embrace those connected by blood or need within their family. Perhaps the only conclusive evidence we have about the children of Nampesh and Suzanne is that Abé Thibault baptized all six.

Unlike his father, Nampesh did not find work with the fur trade forts; work being scarce after the combining of the HBC and NWC posts as this removed the duelling posts within areas

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<sup>67</sup> Denney, Charles, “Hand Written Notes about First Generation of Dumont Family- 2 Pages,” 1974, M7144 file 216,000 Dumont, Jean Baptiste, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>68</sup> Government of Canada Parks Canada Agency, “Parks Canada - Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site - Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site,” August 30, 2016, <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/ab/rockymountain/index.aspx>.

<sup>69</sup> Denney, Charles, “Genealogical Chart 216 050 Gabriel Dumont (Elder),” n.d., M7144 file 216,001 Dumont, Gabriel, Glenbow Archives; Denney, Charles, “Hand Written Notes about First Generation of Dumont Family- 2 Pages”; Barkwell, Lawrence J., “Gabriel Dumont Sr. (Iacaste)” (Gabriel Dumont Institute, December 18, 2013), Biographies- D, Metis Museum/ Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/14305.Gabriel%20Dumont%20Sr.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> Morin, “Descendancy Chart Jean Baptiste Dumont-3693”; Barkwell, Lawrence J., “Gabriel Dumont Sr. (Iacaste).”

<sup>71</sup> Country Marriage refers to a marriage that was accepted by the community, common-law, but not sanctified by the church or on record with the Government. By 1876 with the Indian Act, these marriages were accepted as marriages by the Canadian Government and treated as such- disallowing divorce in the eyes of the Government. Barkwell, Lawrence J., “Gabriel Dumont Sr. (Iacaste).”



combining instead into one reducing the man hours required to run each post.<sup>72</sup> Instead, Nampesh moved farther west and joined the other buffalo hunters at Lac Ste. Anne, the increase in numbers bringing safety to the hunting brigades. Lac Ste. Anne was a large community. It began with two hundred Métis families, but quickly built up to two thousand people (a population that rivalled Fort Edmonton at the time). Nampesh was elected as a leader of the community and explorers who visited and stayed in the region in 1851 referred to him as “old chief, Gabriel Dumont.”<sup>73</sup>

Nampesh’s brother, Isidore was known by most as Ekapow, or Ai-caw-pow, which translates to “The Stander” in Cree. Ekapow was also seen as a leader in the communities in which he lived. Ekapow married Louise Laframboise in 1833, the daughter of a prominent Métis couple Joseph Laframboise and Josephte Assiniboine. Their first-born son, Isidore was born in 1834 followed in 1835 with daughter Pélagie, and a son Gabriel in December 1837. In addition, they had Joseph (b. 1839), Judith (b. 1840), and Elizabeth (b. 1842)— six children born within a decade, although Joseph and Judith both died young.<sup>74</sup>

Ekapow did not always take part in the buffalo hunt as his main source of income. For several years, from approximately 1837 through 1840, the family settled east near Red River and worked at farming and selling pemmican. By 1838, Ekapow and Louise had broken and ploughed three acres of land; growing potatoes and barley, as well as raising horses and their six children. They had a small house with a stable, five horses (three stallions and two mares), two calves, one harrow and a canoe to fish out of. In addition, they owned four river carts.<sup>75</sup>

The Dumonts kept close ties with the Laframboise family, wintering near Fort Pitt during 1840-1848, where François Laframboise, Louise’s brother, was settled. In 1854, Ekapow was voted into the position of buffalo hunt chief, taking over from Pierre Gariépy, and situating himself as a leader in the community.<sup>76</sup> Buffalo hunt chief was an appointed position, elected by the local community hunters. Significantly, it is this structure that would eventually become the basis for Métis social and political systems later on. Norbert Welsh, a Métis buffalo hunter,

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<sup>72</sup> R. C. Macleod, “Biography – DUMONT, GABRIEL – Volume XIII (1901-1910) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography,” accessed March 23, 2016, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/dumont\\_gabriel\\_13E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/dumont_gabriel_13E.html).

<sup>73</sup> Irene M. Spry, *The Palliser Expedition: An Account of John Palliser’s British North American Exploring Expedition 1857 - 1860* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1973), 110.

<sup>74</sup> Denney, Charles, “Genealogical Chart of Isidore Dumont and Louise Laframboise 216,500B,” n.d., M7144 216,500A Dumont, Isidore, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>75</sup> “1838 Census Red River,” 1838, lac\_reel\_c2170 C-2170 142093 RG 31 C 1, Library and Archives Canada, lac\_reel\_c2170 C-2170 142093 RG 31 C 1.

<sup>76</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 9.

hunted with the same brigade as Ekapow, as well as roughly thirty other Métis families. As chief Ekapow led the hunters, Welsh recalls that Ekapow appointed four men to get up early and go scouting for the buffalo, directing themselves north-east, south-east, south-west and north-west. Welsh took the south-west direction towards what would become Calgary, and Gabriel (Ekapow's son), headed north-east. The scouts returned that evening, with three reporting no signs of buffalo, while Welsh on the other hand, had run into an older bull. The council for the hunt included the Cree Chief One Arrow, who would be one of the signatories of Treaty Six. During the council One Arrow declared Welsh's bull to be a sign that there would be herds the next day by lunch.<sup>77</sup> This knowledge of the hunt was passed on, taught to each new generation. The council, led by the hunt chief, worked as a unit to ensure that the hunt would be safe and successful.

Ekapow maintained his leadership role throughout most of his life, working with, and at times against, the colonial powers such as the HBC. In 1849, when the HBC tried to tighten its monopoly on the fur trade, some Métis, including Ekapow, avoided these restrictions by moving to the Saskatchewan River district and selling furs both to HBC and American fur trade markets. It is here that Ekapow garnered the attention of the HBC, "[We are] troubled with strong opposition in the neighbourhood. Escapot [Ekapow/Isidore Dumont], Louis Batoche, Joseph Dauphinais, Emmanuel Champagne, Hyacinthe Parisien, Abraham Bélanger... here [at Carlton] have traded a large quantity of provisions and traded 50 horses."<sup>78</sup> The Métis, Ekapow included, acted in their best interest, as leaders of their families and communities to ensure their survival and success, despite government or company actions to prevent it.

Jean-Baptiste Dumont, known as Ska-kas-ta-ow (Chakasta), stayed close to Ekapow. Many accounts have the two brothers, and their families together at key events such as the signing of Treaty Six.<sup>79</sup> Ekapow and Ska-kas-ta-ow stood out physically compared to Nampesh, described as much larger than him, well over six feet.<sup>80</sup> Ska-kas-ta-ow was president of his community council throughout 1850s, and remained involved in community politics all his life.

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<sup>77</sup> Welsh and Weekes, *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, 42.

<sup>78</sup> "McGillivray to H. Fisher," November 17, 1853, Fisher-Deschambault Papers Correspondence and Genealogies, Saint Boniface Archives.

<sup>79</sup> Government of Canada; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada; Communications Branch, "Treaty Texts - Treaty 6," agreement, (November 3, 2008), <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028710/1100100028783>; John Andrew Kerr, "The Indian Treaties of 1876," 1937, <https://DalSpace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/57392>.

<sup>80</sup> Constance Kerr Sissons, *John Kerr* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1946), 108-10.

For instance, Ska-kas-ta-ow was elected with eight others to represent the Pembina Métis community during negotiations with Governor Ramsey in 1851.<sup>81</sup> In preparation for the negotiations Major Woods told the Métis that in the United States of America they would be seen as “Indians,” urging them to:

“organize themselves into a band, and appoint their chiefs that they might have some order and government amongst themselves with chiefs ...; that as they were, if the United States had any business to transact with them, there was no person to address from whom the wishes of the people could be obtained”<sup>82</sup>

The Métis from the area returned the next day having done just that, providing a letter with nine names including Ska-kas-ta-ow and Jean-Baptiste Wilkie (who’s daughter would marry into the Dumont family).

Similar positions of leadership came about at the Métis community of St. Laurent de Grandin.<sup>83</sup> The brothers Ekapow and Ska-kas-ta-ow were founding members of the settlement, establishing homes on the east bank of the North Saskatchewan River. Ska-kas-ta-ow held the position of president of the St. Laurent group of Métis, and Ekapow was another councillor. These public roles required the Dumont men to negotiate trade and alliances on their community’s behalf. Records indicate, for instance, that both were present during a pipe ceremony in the early 1870s. This ceremony confirmed a trade treaty with the Blackfoot with whom they would then trade and participate with in the Buffalo hunt.<sup>84</sup> Ekapow was considered well off, with fifteen horses and it is likely that Ska-kas-ta-ow was in a similar situation.<sup>85</sup> Ska-kas-ta-ow died in 1884, leaving Ekapow as the only surviving brother to fight in the 1885 Resistance.

Despite the distances between the three brothers, they continued to stay in contact and work together. Nampesh was known as a guide, and he had crossed the Rockies many times. In addition, while he was chief of Lac Ste. Anne, Nampesh was asked to lead the Palliser Expedition in 1858. The Palliser Expedition (named after the lead surveyor John Palliser) took

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<sup>81</sup> Barkwell, Lawrence J., “Gabriel Dumont Sr. (Iacaste).”

<sup>82</sup> Major Samuel Woods, “Pembina Settlement Executive Document No. 51” (n.d.).

<sup>83</sup> The details of the community are the focus of chapter 3 of this thesis and will be discussed later.

<sup>84</sup> Sissons, *John Kerr*, 148.

<sup>85</sup> Diane Paulette Payment, *The Free People - Otipemisiwak: Batoche, Saskatchewan 1870-1930* (Parks Canada, 1990), 34, 37.

place from 1857 to 1860. The goal was to survey the prairies and what would become Western Canada; identifying potential railway routes and plants. Nampesh, along with his brothers, were hired to guide the Expedition through the Rockies. Though Ekapow and Ska-kas-ta-ow did not live with Nampesh at the time, they travelled to join him for the expedition. This illustrates a connection and family support structure that remained despite the miles between them. Interestingly, Nampesh did not want to be involved in the expedition at first. Dr. James Hector, a geologist, naturalist, and surgeon, who was in charge of organizing the expedition through the Rocky Mountains, spent an entire day trying to convince “old chief, Gabriel Dumont” to be the guide.<sup>86</sup>

Most likely Nampesh’s hesitation to take on a leadership role within the expedition was due to the perceived danger involved. The men hired for the expedition were nervous, and insisted that they needed guns and good ammunition for protection. Palliser had tried to dissuade any conflict by visiting with six principal chiefs of the Blackfoot nation and had gained their promise to help prevent the young Blackfoot men from stealing the expedition’s horses and supplies. Nonetheless, Palliser filled his field notes with comments regarding warfare in the area.<sup>87</sup> In the end, Nampesh and his brothers decided that the work was worth it and they agreed to act as guides. Also credited to Nampesh was providing valuable information about the areas to be surveyed in the second season regarding the Mountains and areas to the south.<sup>88</sup>

The Palliser Expedition highlights how this second generation negotiated leadership roles outside of their communities. Not only were they respected buffalo hunt chiefs and integral members to the Métis villages of Lac Ste. Anne and St. Laurent, but they also became highly regarded guides and diplomats to foreigners.

### Marriage

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<sup>86</sup> Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, 110.

<sup>87</sup> John Palliser, “Papers Relative to the Exploration by Captain Palliser of That Portion of British North America Which Lies between the Northern Branch of the River Saskatchewan and the Frontier of the United States; and between the Red River and Rocky Mountains [Microform] : Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, June 1859” (G.E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 1859), 26, CIHM Monograph Collection, University of Alberta Library, [https://archive.org/details/cihm\\_39119](https://archive.org/details/cihm_39119).

<sup>88</sup> Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, 109–10.

*Wahkootawin* traditions of incorporation and citizenry inspired the interconnectedness of familial relationships and helped shape Métis communities.<sup>89</sup> Marriage, then, acted as a vehicle within the Métis *wahkootawin* network system.

Although Jean-Baptiste began his journey west as a French-Canadian man working for the Hudson's Bay Company, his marriage to Josephte and his subsequent interaction with similar mixed families quickly gave way to a Métis identity as demonstrated with the integration of his family into Métis communities. This allowed Jean-Baptiste to straddle both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds and would at times create tensions between the two.<sup>90</sup> His sons, for instance, continued to work with the HBC, but also at times against the HBC, as was the case when Ekapow traded with other buyers to receive better prices to support his family. Inter-marriage between groups was commonly practiced between Indigenous groups. This practice linked Métis families together, with "cross-over" marriages, where members married outside of their local community to another Métis community.<sup>91</sup>

Ekapow's marriage to Louise Laframboise is a perfect illustration of this. Louise was a member of a prominent fur trade and Métis family, with ties to communities in modern-day Michigan. The couple would produce eight surviving children: Isidore (1833-1885), Pelagie (1835-1892), Gabriel (1837-1906), Joseph (1838-1853), Xavier (1840- ?), Isabelle (also known as Elizabeth 1842-1898), Edouard (1845-1907) and Elie (1847- 1925).<sup>92</sup> Louise's father, Joseph Laframboise, was a Métis born on Mackinac Island, in modern day Michigan, who married Josephte Assiniboine in 1799 in the parish of St. François Xavier (modern Manitoba). The Laframboise family spread across the central United States and Canada, ranging from Pembina, North Dakota, through Minnesota and back to the family's home community of Mackinac

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<sup>89</sup> Macdougall notes that *wahkootawin* is her chosen term to represent these concepts due to the predominance of Cree in the area, but similar concepts were displayed in Sioux, Anishnaabe, and Dene. Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 4-8; Allyson Stevenson, "Intimate Integration: A Study of Aboriginal Transracial Adoption in Saskatchewan, 1944-1984," April 28, 2015, 70, <https://ecommons.usask.ca/handle/10388/ETD-2015-04-2021>.

<sup>90</sup> Brenda Macdougall, "'The Comforts of Married Life': Metis Family Life, Labour, and the Hudson's Bay Company," *Labour / Le Travail* 61, no. 0 (March 3, 2008): 13, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/LLT/article/view/9325>.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 23; Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 119.

<sup>92</sup> Charles Denney, "Handwritten Notes Re Jean Baptiste Dumont 216000," 1974, M7144 file 216,000 Dumont, Jean Baptiste, Glenbow Archives; Denney, Charles, "Hand Written Notes about First Generation of Dumont Family- 2 Pages"; Morin, "Descendancy Chart Jean Baptiste Dumont-3693."

Island.<sup>93</sup> They also frequented the Red River area. This family created several marriage connections to the Dumont family. Ekapow's sister, Cecile, who had previously been married to Jacques Berger, married Louise's brother, Joseph Laframboise Jr. (dit Leblanc) and Ekapow's brother Ska-kas-ta-ow also married into the Laframboise family, with a marriage to Marguerite in 1834. The marriage of brother and sister to sister and brother exemplifies the ideal cross-over marriage system, following Cree and Dene patterns of marriage, resulting in close relationships between the families and combining the families hunting areas. These "cross-cousin" alliances saw marriages between the children of their siblings of the opposite sex. Two brothers marrying two sisters from another family was seen as an ideal situation.<sup>94</sup> These three marriages tied the Dumont family closely to the Laframboise family, creating familial and political connections that would extend across the plains, and would continue for generations.

Similar familial strategies are evident in the family of Joseph Dumont (b. 1872). Joseph, whose grandfather was Ekapow and his parents were Isidore and Judith (Parenteau) Dumont, would marry back again into the Laframboise family with his marriage to Marie Rose Laframboise. Joseph's sister, Marie Virginie, would also marry Edouard Laframboise in 1886.<sup>95</sup> Isidore Berger, grandson of Cecile (Ekapow's sister, Gabriel's aunt), would marry back into the Laframboise family with his marriage to Domitilde Laframboise in 1873.<sup>96</sup> These intergenerational marriages between the families created a strong bond that linked the two families. By this time, and unlike their Cree or Dene ancestors, these Métis brothers often remained in the communities of their childhood, rather than moving to live with their wife's family. This enforced unique Métis values and societal structures that followed *wahkootawin* traditions of incorporation and citizenry.<sup>97</sup> Further, marriages allowed for additional opportunities for leadership within Métis society.

#### Gabriel and Madeleine Dumont

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<sup>93</sup> Lucy Murphy, "Women, Networks, and Colonization in Nineteenth-Century Wisconsin," in *Contours of a People Metis Family, Mobility, and History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 230–64, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3571331>.

<sup>94</sup> Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 70.

<sup>95</sup> Lawrence Barkwell, "Joseph Laframboise Sr. (1776-1848)" (Metis Museum, December 19, 2013), Biographies- L, Metis Museum/ Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/14432.Joseph%20Laframboise%20Sr.pdf>; Morin, "Descendancy Chart Jean Baptiste Dumont-3693."

<sup>96</sup> Morin, "Descendancy Chart Jean Baptiste Dumont-3693"; Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 119.

<sup>97</sup> Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 68–70.

Considering the familial practice of cross-over marriages within Métis society, it is not surprising that Gabriel Dumont's marriage was also of this nature. Gabriel married Madeleine Wilkie in 1858 when Gabriel was twenty-one. Madeleine was born in 1840 to Jean-Baptiste Wilkie and his wife Isabella Azure, in Pembina. Jean-Baptiste was a retired buffalo hunt chief for his community (White Horse Plain Hunt) at the time of their marriage. The marriage took place at St. Joseph, south of what would become the Canadian Border and in the Dakota Territory. The French Missionary Priest Father Joseph Goiffon presided over the wedding.

This marriage tied the Dumont family to the Wilkie family; a Saskatchewan-based family to a Métis family from south of the Medicine Line. These families already knew each other well. For instance, they hunted together during the summer of 1851, when the Red River and White Horse Plain<sup>98</sup> Métis buffalo brigades joined the Pembina area Métis in a battle against the Dakota Sioux at Grand Coteau.<sup>99</sup> Thus, the families not only hunted together, but they fought together as well. These marriages were chosen with careful consideration and attention to *wahkootawin* processes in order to further a family's connections across the prairies and create crucial alliances to meet economic, political and military needs. Even more, they extended the Dumont tradition of leadership with in-laws that held similar positions.

The marriage and move to join Gabriel's family did not separate the Wilkies from the Dumonts. Gabriel and Madeleine's father, Jean-Baptiste, worked together. In 1861, Jean-Baptiste and Métis leader Peter Grant were elected to speak with President Lincoln. At the advice and support of the President, the two men returned and gathered other Métis representatives to meet with the Dakota Sioux and form a treaty. At this event, representatives from the Wilkie, Dumonts, and Laframboise families were all present.<sup>100</sup>

Marriages like the Dumonts and the Wilkies went beyond community needs, however, and often resulted in unions of true respect and love. John Kerr, a man from Upper Canada who moved west to find adventure with the buffalo hunts, lived with Dumont's hunting brigade for two years in the early 1870s. Kerr tells us that Madeleine, whom he refers to as "Magdeleine,"

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<sup>98</sup> Ekapow would become the buffalo hunt chief of the White Horse Plain group later in 1854

<sup>99</sup> William Morton, "The Battle of Grand Coteau: July 13 and 14, 1851," in *Historical Essays on the Prairie Provinces* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1970), 45-59.

<sup>100</sup> Story is retold by Gregoire Monnette, husband to Philomene Wilkie, Grand-Daughter of Chief Wilkie. He told this story in 1917 which was transcribed by Mrs. John Mahon. This transcription is republished in: *St. Ann's Centennial: 100 Years of Faith, Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, Belcourt, North Dakota, 1885-1985 :: North Dakota County and Town Histories*, 1985, 231-232, <http://digitalhorizonsonline.org/cdm/ref/collection/ndsl-books/id/28098>.

was an attractive woman and he was not sure why she was with “such a homely chap as Gabriel.”<sup>101</sup> Kerr also spoke against the popular image of Dumont as a violent man, stating in his memoirs that Gabriel never made an unkind word towards Madeleine. Kerr tells of a man that was kind and had a good bond with his wife.<sup>102</sup> Dumont described the relationship in similar terms, saying “We are always together, and what is done to her is as if it was done to me.”<sup>103</sup>

Gabriel was loyal to Madeleine and, at times, took on entire groups of people to defend her honour. Gabriel’s memoirs, for instance, begin with a story of a time when he killed a Blackfoot man—all due to defending his wife’s honour. Gabriel had just returned to their group of six or seven tents near a Cree camp to find out that his horse, which had been hobbled, was gone. Madeleine informed Gabriel that a man had come and demanded to have the horse. When she refused his request, he told her “If you don’t unlock the padlock, I’ll kill the horse.”<sup>104</sup> According to Gabriel, Madeline released the horse to the Cree and Gabriel took off after him to defend her honour. Upon entering the Cree camp, the horse thieves explained to Gabriel that it was all just a misunderstanding. Their law allowed them to get the best horses from their friends and allies when they were facing a fight. They had not intended to offend him or his wife. Gabriel, who declared he did not care for their laws, was upset his wife had been threatened. In the end a compromise was found, and Gabriel joined the Cree in their battle against the Blackfoot, taking the life of a man the Cree saw as their enemy, a Blackfoot man.<sup>105</sup> Through Gabriel’s rendition of this incident we can see how this was not only about retrieving horses but simultaneously an act of devotion to his wife. His passion to confront the Cree, an ally, was a response to protect and defend the woman he loved, while not damaging alliances created between communities.

John Kerr’s recollections continue to comment on the nature of the relationship between Madeleine and Gabriel. Kerr recalls one time when the Dumont family was out hunting and they came across a starving Cree family that they had previously traded and gambled with. Kerr, unwilling to leave the family with nothing, left his food with them and went to find Gabriel. Kerr explained that people faced with trouble often sought out Gabriel. Gabriel responded to Kerr by

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<sup>101</sup> Sissons, *John Kerr*, 108.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 108–10.

<sup>103</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont : The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, 71; Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 36.

<sup>104</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 36.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 35–37.



telling “his wife Magdeleine, to get some meat from the storehouse.”<sup>106</sup> Madeleine, however, was not impressed that Gabriel was once again giving away their food to someone in need, and grumbled while she lugged a fifty-pound buffalo leg and some pemmican to the flat-sled for the Cree family.<sup>107</sup> The story demonstrates a couple which worked closely together. Madeleine made her feelings known to her husband, while she compromised for her husband’s desires and the survival of another family. The marriage, at least in this instance, was a partnership built on respect and compromise.

Madeleine stepped into leadership roles within the community, often acting as a teacher at the Batoche settlement. The school in Batoche was an extension of the original school built in St. Laurent. A combination of the Catholic Church, Canadian government, and the people of St. Laurent funded the school and tensions flared between these groups. After its founding in 1875, the trustees wished to move the school closer to the people and take over control of the school pushing the church out. Unfortunately, this did not succeed, and the Church regained control of the school a year later. In 1883 and 1885 the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus stepped in to run the school, creating a Catholic school that was plagued by a shortage of teachers.<sup>108</sup>

It is during this time that Madeleine became a teacher at the school. It is possible that Madeleine filled the position in a response to local community concerns that the students were spending most of their time doing chores. Community members were also upset that the children were not being taught English and that many of their own local citizens were more qualified teachers than those provided by the Catholic group.<sup>109</sup> As a member of a prominent Métis family and an educated women with no children at the time, Madeleine Dumont would have been an ideal candidate to address these issues and lead the St. Laurent youth to higher education.

### Children

The partnership between Gabriel and Madeleine never produced biological offspring but it seems likely that the couple adopted several children over the course of their marriage. Adoption in the family was not unusual, as Gabriel’s uncle Ska-kas-ta-ow was possibly adopted by his parents Jean-Baptiste and Josephte.<sup>110</sup> Adoption was a common practice in the region by the Métis, following the concepts of *wahkootowin*. Adoptions created relationships that

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 108–10.

<sup>108</sup> Payment, *The Free People - Otipemisiwak*, 103–4.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Dubue, “Letter from Reverend Dubue.”

mimicked biological relationships between parents, children, family, and community. They drew the adoptee into a web of relations that went beyond the family and into the greater Métis nation. These adoptions also included adoption of unrelated people that created ‘fictive kinship’ ties based in Indigenous culture and belief systems.<sup>111</sup> Adoption ensured that relatives were taken care of, while also maintaining a greater number of people within the family to share the workload.

There were three children connected to Madeleine and Gabriel: Veronique, referred to as “Annie” by Gabriel, was the biological daughter of Gabriel’s cousin Jacques Dumont;<sup>112</sup> Marie, who was possibly adopted or Gabriel’s biological child from another woman; and Alexandre, who Dumont refers to as his “son” in his memoirs.<sup>113</sup> Veronique Dumont was born 1863 and was baptized on May 12, 1864, in St. Albert. She was the daughter of Jacques, Gabriel’s cousin, and Marieanne “Annie” Bruneau. Gabriel referred to Veronique as “Annie” due to the fact she looked so similar to her mother.<sup>114</sup> Veronique’s mother passed away November 24, 1865, and her father remarried to Marianne Breland, both who died along with her two stepbrothers, Benjamine and Baptiste, in 1870 from smallpox.<sup>115</sup> Veronique was seven; her older brother Thimothé was eleven. She also had an older sister, Adelaide, who was eighteen and married by the time of their parent’s deaths. Details on Veronique’s life are not abundant. The years she spent with Gabriel and Madeleine are not confirmed, but through the following investigation, some dates can be narrowed down.

Veronique’s descendants argue that Gabriel and Madeleine raised her after the death of her parents. The family oral histories state that the couple raised her after she left the Mission at St. Albert and before she went to work for the HBC.<sup>116</sup> Veronique was with the Grey Nuns until

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<sup>111</sup> Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 82; Stevenson, “Intimate Integration,” 64.

<sup>112</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, 71.

<sup>113</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 98; Marie Sauve, “Affidavit No. 6340 for Scrip,” February 19, 1877, RG 15, D-II-3, Vol. 196 File no. HB4648, Library and Archives Canada; Darren R. Prefontaine, *Gabriel Dumont: Li Chef Michif in Images and in Words* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011), 4.

<sup>114</sup> Denney, Charles, “Genealogical Chart 216 625,” n.d., M7144 file 216,625 Dumont, Gabriel, Glenbow Archives; W. Lloyd Hamilton, “(Copy) To Manitoba Provincial Archivist by Lloyd Hamilton,” June 4, 1973, M7144 Sundry Dumont, Glenbow Archives; Gail Morin, *Individual Summary Veronique Dumont (Hamilton) 22023*, n.d.; “From St Loachin’s Parish Register 1859-1890,” n.d., M7144 file 216,001 Dumont, Gabriel, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>115</sup> Charles Denney, “Data Culled from Two Hamilton Letters,” 1974, M7144 file 216,000 Dumont, Jean Baptiste, Glenbow Archives; Lawrence Barkwell, “Veronique Marie Dumont - 11961,” accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/db/11961>.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Denney in his correspondence with Lloyd Hamilton, Veronique’s grandson, questions whether Veronique was actually adopted by her grandfather Gabriel (Nampesh) W. Lloyd Hamilton, “Letter W. Lloyd Hamilton to Charles Denney Re Veronique and Family History July 19 1974,” July 19, 1974, M7144 file 216,000 Dumont, Jean Baptiste, Glenbow Archives.

age fourteen, training as a teacher in Winnipeg and then came to live with Gabriel and Madeleine. Veronique's family oral histories tell of her moving in with Gabriel and being raised by the "rebel chief" and even participating as a nurse in the 1885 Resistance.<sup>117</sup>

Genealogist Charles Denney has questioned whether the "Gabriel" that adopted Veronique was possibly her grandfather Nampesh. However, her descendants remain firm that it was Gabriel and Madeleine who raised her in the Saskatchewan area. Denney, in his letter to Lloyd Hamilton, states that he believes the distance was too great for it to be Gabriel and Madeleine who raised her. He believes that it was more likely her grandfather, Nampesh, who was from the Edmonton area that raised her. As shown earlier, the family traveled great distances to support one another, so that the adoption of a teenager could take place over the distance of St. Albert to St. Laurent is not surprising. Denney also declares that Kerr never mentions any children when he lived with Dumont in the early 1870s.

These arguments, however, are speculation and do not definitively prove that it was not Gabriel and Madeleine who adopted Veronique.<sup>118</sup> Sources, including Gabriel himself, refer to an "Annie," and family knowledge dictates that "Annie" was Veronique, a nickname from her adopted father Gabriel. As to Kerr not seeing Veronique with Gabriel and Madeleine, she was not an orphan until 1870, which is just before John Kerr joined Gabriel's hunting group. It is known that when she was orphaned the Grey Nuns first took her in until she was fourteen, which would have been approximately between the years 1870 and 1877. So it is clear that Kerr, who was no longer living with Dumont by 1873, would not have seen Veronique with the Dumonts. As well, the last time that Kerr states he saw Gabriel was in 1876 at the signing of Treaty Six, before Veronique would have come to live with the family.<sup>119</sup>

Denney also proposes that the Annie, who was baptised at St. Laurent de Grandin on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1878, at age fifteen, is not Veronique but instead another child named Annie that was taken in by Gabriel and Madeleine. The note on the baptism certificate is that Annie was of "Sauteuse" origin, but there is no information on where this information came from or the date it was added to the certificate. It is possible that the baptism could have been Veronique while she lived with Gabriel and Madeleine, with her being baptized under the name she used in her years

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Denney, Charles, "Letter from Charles Denney to Lloyd Hamilton Re Veronique Dumont June 22 1974," June 22, 1974, M7144 file 216,000 Dumont, Jean Baptiste, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>119</sup> Barkwell, "Veronique Marie Dumont - 11961"; Kerr, "The Indian Treaties of 1876."

with the couple.<sup>120</sup> Thus, Denney's logic regarding Veronique's upbringing does not bring definitive proof that the oral history of Veronique's family is incorrect. Despite the issues raised by Denney, the oral histories may still present a more accurate story.

In fact, Veronique herself recounted specific stories of her adopted father Gabriel during the Resistance. She told her children, "Gabriel wasn't afraid, and didn't understand why anyone else would be afraid either, after going through hell... and coming out alive! To him, it was exhilarating to be unafraid, but terrible to have fear. He had a hole in his head and various bullet holes all over his body, but at Batoche, he only worried about us, the kids."<sup>121</sup> It is clear that this story is about Gabriel, not Nampesh, who died in 1880 before the 1885 North-West Resistance. Thus providing an extra piece of evidence suggesting that Gabriel was her adopted father.

Dumont also referred to Alexandre Fageron as an adopted son. There are little details on how, when or why the Dumonts adopted Alexandre. Dumont's *Memoires* refers to Alexandre as "son fils adoptif" or "my adopted son."<sup>122</sup> Beyond this testimony we have little else. The other child connected with Dumont is Marie, who on her scrip application indicated she was the natural child of Gabriel. No other information is known, as to who her mother was, or if she considered herself as an adopted child or his biological child.<sup>123</sup> Some accounts refer to the Dumonts having adopted several other children, however, these stories have no more details of who these children were or when they were adopted. Adoption allowed the Métis identity and family to continue beyond the death of parents. Gabriel and Madeleine had a history of taking in those in need, adopting them as if a family member, thus making their adoption not exceptional but expected.

Like the other members of the Dumont family, these adopted children rallied for family causes and stepped into leadership roles. Veronique, who, before her marriage, worked for the HBC near Edmonton, came to back to Batoche for the 1885 North-West Resistance. She further supported the war effort by acting as a nurse. Likewise, her brother Alexandre joined his father on the battlefield and fought with Gabriel throughout the Resistance. He then followed his parents to Montana for refuge. In this context, the public support of Gabriel Dumont's children for the Métis fight was simultaneously a reflection of their support for their father's leadership, as

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<sup>120</sup> Denney, Charles, "Letter from Charles Denney to Lloyd Hamilton Re Veronique Dumont June 22 1974."

<sup>121</sup> Barkwell, "Veronique Marie Dumont - 11961."

<sup>122</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 97.

<sup>123</sup> Marie Sauve, "Affidavit No. 6340 for Scrip."

well as their family's leadership within Métis society. Veronique and Alexandre would have been in the public eye and their actions would not have gone unnoticed.

### Extended Family

John Kerr and his friend Marion joined Gabriel Dumont's hunting expedition in the 1870s. They had little supplies left at the time and were thankful to find the brigade. Kerr and Marion were accepted almost immediately as one of the family. In fact, they were allowed to sleep in Gabriel's family tent from the start. Kerr recalled the circumstances in the following way:

"To me he was kindness itself. He adopted me into his family, and never called me by the name bestowed upon me by the rest of his band, namely le *Petite Canada*, (Petit referred to my age, for I had height) but invariably addressed me as *Mon, frère*, while his family and relatives called me son, nephew, cousin, and so forth, and I spoke to them in similar terms."<sup>124</sup>

Gabriel and Madeleine adopted these men into the family creating a 'fictive kinship,' between non-related kin. The couple's motivations for this adoption are consistent with *wahkootawin* customs. Kerr demonstrated not only good citizenry and values, but aided the family's survival by participating in the hunt and contributing to the family work by taking on the role of cook. In addition, this extended family would have offered opportunities for friendly dealings with outsiders and settler society.

### Conclusion

This chapter has traced generations of family members from Jean-Baptiste to Gabriel Dumont. This intergenerational exploration of marriage and adoption has demonstrated that the Dumont family embraced the concept of *wahkootowin*, a concept that was integral to creating and maintaining leadership roles within 19<sup>th</sup> century Metis society. Kinship, therefore, was a crucial component to Métis leadership and allowed Gabriel Dumont and his family to create an influential dynasty on the prairies.

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<sup>124</sup> Sissons, *John Kerr*, 87-88.

## Chapter Two: Diplomacy

This chapter highlights Gabriel Dumont's diplomatic initiatives before 1885. Specifically, it looks at the Dakota Sioux Treaty (1862) and the Numbered Treaty 6 (1876). For the most part, scholars have neglected Dumont's involvement in both of these treaties. The participation of the Métis, and more specifically Gabriel Dumont, has received minimal attention by scholars working on the Dakota Sioux and the movement of this group across the Medicine Line<sup>125</sup> and into Canada in the 1860s. Peter Elias and David McCrady, for instance, do discuss negotiations between the Dakota Sioux and the Métis, referencing the first-hand accounts of witnesses such as Norbert Welsh, Jean-Baptiste Wilkie, and Dumont's own memoirs.<sup>126</sup> In addition, McCrady stated that Dumont discussed the peace negotiations at Devil's Lake and that he was almost killed at the event. McCrady however, argues that it was Gabriel's father, Ekapow, and Uncle, Ska-kas-ta-ow, who were actually involved with the negotiations.<sup>127</sup> Métis scholar Adam Gaudry adds insight into the relationship between the Métis and the Dakota Sioux, exploring the notion of *kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk* (to own or govern themselves as a world view of independence) and their diplomatic relations through several decades of the nineteenth century, however, the 1862 treaty itself is not explored.<sup>128</sup> Still, Gaudry emphasizes Dumont's involvement in alliances, especially those with the Cree, discussing his role as hunt chief, as well his ability to use the peace pipe in creating these alliances.<sup>129</sup> These informative studies fail, however, to include the important details concerning key participants, and as a result they end up downplaying Dumont's involvement in 1862.

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<sup>125</sup> The Medicine Line refers what is the modern American/Canadian border, particularly from the Midwest to the Pacific coast.

<sup>126</sup> David G. McCrady, "Living with Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands" (Dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1998), <http://cyber.usask.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cyber.usask.ca/docview/304468326?accountid=14739>; Peter Douglas Elias, *The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest: Lessons for Survival*, Barron Native Studies Collection (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988).

<sup>127</sup> McCrady, "Living with Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands," 38–19.

<sup>128</sup> Adam Gaudry, "Kaa-Tipeyimishoyaahk- 'We Are Those Who Own Ourselves': A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870" (Dissertation, University of Victoria, 2014).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

Similar circumstances exist within Treaty 6 scholarship. This 1876 treaty has received attention regarding the negotiating First Nations Chiefs who would sign the Treaty, the federal Indian agents, as well as eyewitnesses and interpreters such as Peter Erasmus. Historian J.R. Miller discusses the involvement of Métis with in the western treaties, stating that in both Treaty 4 and 3 the Métis were a factor. They were influential in the success of the treaties, as their First Nation allies saw Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris' treatment of the Métis at the negotiations as a reason to take offense.<sup>130</sup> Miller continues that the Saulteaux were concerned that their Métis brothers should be included in Treaty 6 but treaty commissioners only vaguely responded to the request. In addition, and more relevant to this thesis, Miller makes no mention of Dumont during these negotiations.<sup>131</sup>

Similar to modern scholars, contemporaries of Dumont also neglected to publish much about his diplomatic contributions to these treaties. John Kerr, for instance, failed to highlight Dumont's work. Kerr states explicitly that in his belief it was Gabriel Dumont's uncle and father (Ska-kas-ta-ow and Ekapow) that made peace with the Dakota Sioux in 1862, determining that Gabriel had nothing to do with the affair. Kerr makes this conclusion despite that he was not a witness to that Treaty.<sup>132</sup> "These two," according to Kerr, "Gabriel's father and uncle, were leaders of Métis Plain-hunters, and to them more than to Gabriel was due the peace pact with the

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<sup>130</sup> J.R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 172, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10382289>.

<sup>131</sup> Michel Hogue also describes that allied Cree bands in the Saskatchewan district requested Métis inclusion in Treaty 6, however this was not included to the original treaty (pg 10-11) Additional information on Treaty 6 can be found in the following sources: Michel Hogue, *Metis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People*, 2015, 10-11; J.R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 172, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10382289>; Samuel B. Steele (Samuel Benfield), *Forty Years in Canada: Reminiscences of the Great North-West with Some Account of His Service in South Africa* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1915); Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories: Including the Negotiations on Which They Were Based, and Other Information Relating Thereto*: By Alexander Morris (Toronto: Belfords, Clarke & Co., 1880), <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com.cyber.usask.ca/tinyurl/3yP7d9>; John Andrew Kerr, "The Indian Treaties of 1876," 1937, <https://DalSpace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/57392>; Morris 1826-1889 Alexander, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories, Including the Negotiations on Which They Were Based, and Other Information Relating Thereto* (Toronto: Belfords, 1880); Arthur J Ray, J. R. Miller, and Frank Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence a History of Saskatchewan Treaties* (Montreal [Que.]: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), <http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/400325>; Robert J. Talbot, *Negotiating the Numbered Treaties: An Intellectual and Political Biography of Alexander Morris* (Saskatoon: Purich Pub, 2009).

<sup>132</sup> Kerr, "Gabriel Dumont: A Personal Memory," 53.

Sioux.”<sup>133</sup> This chapter argues against these interpretations and current scholarship and provides evidence that not only did Gabriel Dumont play an important part in these treaties, but also that his diplomatic initiatives superseded his warrior reputation before the 1885 North-West Resistance. Leadership within the Métis society required the ability to lead in diplomatic situations.

## 1862

Ekapow introduced the buffalo hunt to Gabriel at a young age. Gabriel joined his father on the hunt for the first time in 1851, leaving the borders of what would become Canada to travel across the Medicine Line to what is modern day North Dakota. The hunt began like many, with two groups from Saint-Boniface and Pembina area as well as a group from Saint Francois-Xavier, gathering for a general council to discuss the rules of the chase. The decision was made by the council to create two hunting brigades working parallel lines from each other approximately twenty to thirty miles apart. This would allow the groups to not interfere with each other, but allow them to remain close enough if any issues arose with the local Dakota Sioux. The hunt continued for several days, constantly on the move from June 19<sup>th</sup> 1851 to Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup>. Here the Saint François group reached the Grand Coteau region. Sending scouts ahead, they climbed to the top of the buttes and saw below them a large number of Dakota. The decision was made to camp in a protected area and prepare to defend themselves if need be. Five Métis scouts rode towards the Dakota, where they were informed that they were now prisoners. Two Métis scouts escaped and three remained: James Whiteford, an un-named “McGillis boy” and so-called “Malaterre.” The two escapees rode back quickly to the campsite and the Métis sprang into action to protect themselves.<sup>134</sup>

The Métis created their customary defense strategy and it proved to be very effective. They turned the Red River carts into a circle, with the horses and cattle ‘corralled’ on the interior. Trenches were dug under the carts for the women and children to be protected and the Métis men created rifle pits to defend from and that allowed them to keep the Dakota at a distance.<sup>135</sup> The Dakota did not attack immediately, the preparations took place and the Métis waited all through

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Morton, “The Battle of Grand Coteau: July 13 and 14, 151,” 45–59.

<sup>135</sup> Morton, “The Battle of Grand Coteau: July 13 and 14, 151.”



the night before the scouts signalled the advancement of the Dakota. Historian William Morton has described the battle based on the records of survivors such as Rev. Lafleche

“The mass of the Sioux now closed in and surrounded the camp, as Lafleche wrote, like a waistband. Indian-fashion, they did not charge in a body. They crept forward, sniping; they made sudden dashes; now and then excited braves would come charging in on horseback, and swerve off shooting from the saddle, or under their horses necks. It was exciting, it was dangerous, but it was not the one thing that might have brought victory to the Sioux, the overwhelming of the metis by their numbers.”<sup>136</sup>

By 1851 the Métis had already developed their own style of protection in war, and this proved successful against the Dakota. Although the Métis were outnumbered by the Dakota, their battle was a success. In the end, they survived two waves of attacks and lost only one of their members.<sup>137</sup> According to scholars George Woodcock and Darren Préfontaine, the treatment that the Dakota Sioux gave the body (stripped and mutilated) of the fallen Métis comrade left a lasting impression on Dumont.<sup>138</sup> This event, often retold in the histories of Gabriel Dumont, is interpreted as a rite of passage and an important training experience in learning the ways of war.<sup>139</sup> Woodcock states that Dumont, at age fourteen, was elated with the victory and implies that his future as a sharp shooter was encouraged from this experience.<sup>140</sup> When placed in comparison to the events of 1862 that would follow, however, this event also demonstrates that Dumont understood the need for diplomacy often outweighed the need for war. For Gabriel Dumont, to have witnessed and experienced the violence of the war at such a young age, one could understand if he was continuously wary of the Dakota Sioux in the future; instead his

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>137</sup> The numbers in the battle are contested. Denis Combet refers to hundreds of Sioux, where Morton's article which works off of personal accounts of the battle places the number at a 'exaggerated' couple thousand. Either way most academics agree that the Sioux greatly outnumbered the Metis which may have led to the Metis reflections on the event to be exaggerated in actual number. William Morton, "The Battle of Grand Coteau: July 13 and 14, 1851," *Manitoba Historical Society Transactions*, 3, 1960 Season 1959, [www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/grandcoteau.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/grandcoteau.shtml); Denis P. Combet, "Gabriel Dumont, the Last of Great Metis Leaders," *Encyclopedia of French Cultural Heritage in North America*, 2009, [http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-484/Gabriel\\_Dumont\\_the\\_Last\\_of\\_Great\\_M%C3%A9tis\\_Leaders.html](http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-484/Gabriel_Dumont_the_Last_of_Great_M%C3%A9tis_Leaders.html).

<sup>138</sup> Préfontaine, *Gabriel Dumont*, 4; George Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2003), 62–64.

<sup>139</sup> Préfontaine, *Gabriel Dumont*, 4; Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont*, 64.

<sup>140</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont : The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, 62.

willingness to negotiate a peace treaty a decade later demonstrates that Dumont was not simply a warrior but rather a diplomat, a leader, someone who saw war as a last option.

By 1860 life had changed drastically for the Dakota Sioux. As settlement pushed west in the United States, the Dakota Sioux were embroiled in a war with the American Army over land that was earmarked by the federal government for settlers. By 1862 thousands of Dakota Sioux were seized by the military, imprisoned in stockades, and thirty-eight were hung as war criminals, as well hundreds died in prison camps from starvation. What had once been a large nation of Dakota was now weakened both in numbers and in morale. As a last attempt to free themselves from the clutches of the American Army, they decided that if they were not successful in a last stand against the army, they would flee north of the Medicine Line to British lands.

Historian Peter Douglas Elias argues that the Dakota Sioux felt that moving north to the British land was the best option, as these western prairies were seen as a place of dispute with no one group holding an ultimate claim. The Canadian government, British Crown, the Hudson's Bay Company, and Churches all had stakes in the area. They were battling for their own interests and this uncertainty and lack of rigid social and governmental structures would allow the Dakota to settle with little issue.<sup>141</sup> Still, the Dakota understood that the move would require negotiations, especially with the Métis, with whom their relationship was strained after the 1851 battle. Elias argues that the Dakota also recognized that the Métis, especially in the Red River area, were the most cohesive and powerful group in the region.<sup>142</sup>

Several groups of Dakota moved towards Devil's Lake, in modern day North Dakota, to avoid the American Army that followed them, while other smaller groups moved further north into the British Territory in the winter of 1862. Those who remained in American territory followed north in the spring of 1863.<sup>143</sup> The Dakota Sioux understood that good relationships with the Indigenous groups in these areas, on both sides of the Medicine Line, would be needed for them to gain access to land and engage in trade, which was necessary for survival.<sup>144</sup>

Several negotiations took place over a two-year period between the Métis and the Dakota Sioux. In May 1863 a party of Métis hunters from Buffalo River, near Fort Abercrombie,

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<sup>141</sup> Elias, *The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest*, 19.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 20–21.

<sup>144</sup> McCrady, "Living with Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands," 37.

reported that eight Dakota came to their camp, smoked the peace pipe and wished to live in peace with them. Jean-Baptiste Wilkie Sr. camped at Woods End on Souris River to trade with the Dakota who also camped there, and Father Alexis André (who would later be at St. Laurent de Grandin with Gabriel Dumont) acted as peace negotiator on behalf of the American Government. A peace treaty with William McKay, who in 1862 was in charge of Fort Ellice, and Little Six, a Dakota Leader, followed with other leaders at Fort Ellice.<sup>145</sup> It is clear that the move north did not result in one negotiation, but instead several, where relationships were forged and past issues addressed.

It is the negotiations that took place in 1862 between several prominent Métis leaders and the Dakota Sioux near Devil's Lake that is of particular interest. Families represented at this meeting were the Wilkies, Dumonts, and Laframboise, which together represented a large area of both the Northern and Southern side of the Medicine Line, in what would become Saskatchewan, Manitoba, North Dakota, and even connections into Michigan through the Laframboise family. Gregoire Monnette (1885-1931) recalled the family story regarding the tense negotiations to the *Courier-Democrat* of Langdon in 1917. Monnette was married to Philomene Wilkie the granddaughter of Chief Jean-Baptiste Wilkie.<sup>146</sup> Monnette related to the paper "incidents of Gabriel's sagacity in dealing with the Indians and adding that he was (as far as the time would permit him to be) a very humane and brave man, a great trapper and hunter, no one could equal him...."<sup>147</sup> Monnette's recollections provide a preliminary report of Dumont's participation in the 1862 diplomatic proceedings. This version of the events provides more details into the negotiation than any other source and helps clarify Dumont's role in the negotiations.

The origins of the Devil Lake negotiations stemmed from immediate concerns over the movement and agitations with the Dakota Sioux. Chief Wilkie was worried about the uprisings

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 41–42.

<sup>146</sup> Note: The *Courier-Democrat* ceased publication in 1923. There are no known file copies of the publication after 1914. This particular story, along with a number of others, was thought to be lost. However it, and the others, were "discovered" in June 1978 in the archives of the University of North Dakota. These stories had been pasted into an old ledger book from the Mahon Lumber Yard, a pioneer industry at Langdon, which has now been closed for many years. Sometime after 1927 the book containing these stories became the property of Cecil Mahon in Canada. When the University requested valued historical materials from their alumni, Mr. Mahon, an early alumnus of UND, contributed the book to their collection. This particular story then became a part of a series, "Sourcebooks of Cavalier County History," and the pages which follow are taken from Volume I, pages 157-183. No effort has been made to edit or change the material. The spelling of names used in 1917 has been copied in this edition. *St. Ann's Centennial: 100 Years of Faith, Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, Belcourt, North Dakota, 1885-1985 : North Dakota County and Town Histories*, 1985, 228–29, <http://digitalhorizonsonline.org/cdm/ref/collection/ndsl-books/id/28098>.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 231.

and unrest surrounding them, and in consultation with his community, determined that the best action would be to send representatives to travel and discuss the issue with President Lincoln. Peter Grant and Chief Wilkie were chosen as the representatives and they travelled east. Upon meeting with the President and discussing their concerns, President Lincoln advised them that he would provide them with any ammunition needed, but he cautioned, “not to induce trouble but to go to them as brothers taking with them the bravest and best to make parley for peace.”<sup>148</sup> Grant and Wilkie returned to their people relaying the President’s message.<sup>149</sup>

Jean-Baptiste Wilkie, Peter Grant, Gabriel Dumont, Joseph Laframboise, Antoine Fleury along with seven unnamed others were chosen to approach the Dakota and attempt to negotiate peace. Likely the large number of men were chosen for several reasons; they gained safety in numbers, while these several prominent men also demonstrated that the group represented a large portion of Métis from across the prairies and they were interested in peace. As representatives from different regions, from as north as St. Laurent, west to Red River, south to Pembina and even to Michigan, these men symbolized the variety and unity of the Métis.

This was not an easy task for the Métis, as the Dakota were not enthusiastic to see the group approach. Instead, the Métis were met with the Dakota Sioux yelling death threats towards them. It is not clear why so many of the Dakota were against the Métis coming into their village; was it due to bad blood from the previous battle or was it because word had spread that the Métis had been in talks with the President? Most likely it was a combination of both; word of Wilkie and Grant’s travels had likely spread and they may have assumed that the Métis were on the side of the American Army. In addition, seeing a group of armed leaders from several Métis groups likely made them uneasy. However, the chief (whose name is not stated in any of the records), understood that this visit was to negotiate; no one would send their leaders into a camp alone to start a war. The chief invited the Métis men into his lodge and declared that they would remain safe.

While the protesters stayed outside, banging and slashing their knives against the walls of the lodge, the negotiations began. In his newspaper interview, Monette does not give details on what specifically was negotiated. However, his version, passed down to him from Jean-Baptiste Wilkie, places Gabriel as a key negotiator alongside Wilkie. Gabriel, thirsty from the travels,

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 232–232.

asked the chief for a drink of water. Dumont was initially denied this request. Wilkie, alarmed, took this as a sign of great disrespect. Dumont, who became aware of Wilkie's increased tension, asked him, "what is wrong with you?" and Wilkie passed on his concerns that the refusal to provide water was a sign of great disrespect and that this created a difficult start to the negotiations.<sup>150</sup> Dumont seems to have agreed and declared that he "won't die before I kill my full share" and grabbed his gun.<sup>151</sup> He did not, however, begin to fight. Instead Dumont, having now shown that he was willing to defend his honour and respect with violence, asked for another glass of water, and it was immediately served. Gabriel Dumont's willingness to demand respect and his apparent demonstration that the Métis were willing to fight if these negotiations were not successful, helped establish the Métis as equal negotiators. This was vitally important after the disrespect shown to them outside and inside of the lodge for negotiations to continue in a positive manner. With a symbol of civility finally given, in the form of a glass of water, negotiations began with both groups looking for peace.

Wilkie began the negotiations and acted as the main voice for the Métis. In the end, the peace pipe was introduced. The pipe was long and ornamented with human hair that reached the ground, bear claws, and porcupine quills. The Métis gave gifts of tobacco, tea and sugar to the Dakota. The Dakota chief promised them safe passage home and stated "you have seen here some of my bad children, you may meet them on the way, but if they attempt to harm you, kill them, and I will protect you."<sup>152</sup> The Dakota outside of the tent either did not hear this declaration of protection, or chose to ignore it. As Dumont bent down to exit the narrow opening of the lodge, which was covered by a flap of hide, he was hit in the head with the barrel end of a rifle and was simultaneously shot at. The shot missed and he escaped with only a minor contusion on his head. The Dakota chief's men jumped on the offender and chased him from the camp beating him with sticks for dishonouring the promise of protection.<sup>153</sup> The Métis, determined to not leave on poor terms after this attack, invited the Dakota to visit the Wilkie settlement. The Dakota later visited, and left their horses behind. This could have been a trade or possibly given as a gift in a sign of friendship.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> "Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus Provincial Archives Canada Item List with Description of Items," n.d., 232, Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

<sup>151</sup> *St. Ann's Centennial*, 232.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 40.

<sup>154</sup> *St. Ann's Centennial*, 232.

Dumont's inclusion in this peace treaty with the Dakota demonstrates how, at age twenty-five, he was seen not only as a leader, but also as a representative of his community in times of tension. He was not just entrusted with the safety of his people during the hunt, but also in situations where their long-term security was at stake. Although Dumont's retelling of this negotiation, and even Monette's version of it, showcases the violence that surrounded the event, Dumont did not use violence— instead Dumont demonstrated that he was willing to use his reputation as an expert shot to gain respect. This seems to have been a means to allow negotiations to continue. He continued to put the greater good of his people ahead of retaliation.

Monette's testimony of Dumont's actions tells of other times where Dumont was easily capable of killing someone but decided against lethal violence. The event that follows is combined from both Dumont's own memoirs along with Monette's interview and took place before the 1862 treaty.<sup>155</sup> Dumont relates that while he was out scouting for Chief Wilkie's hunt he came across what appeared to be a wolf. Dumont hid in the slough and watched to confirm his suspicion that the wolf was actually a Gros-Ventre/Sioux man in disguise. According to Monette "He was soon rewarded by seeing the wolf pull off his skin, fold it into a pillow and lie down at the back of a great stone."<sup>156</sup> Monette continued, observing that Dumont had many choices ahead of him,

"he said to himself, if I approach him this way, he will have an advantage over me; so he got off his horse and left him again at the bottom of the hill. He advanced; he saw the sleeping man whose rifle was on the ground next to him. Gabriel also had a rifle in his hands, ready to defend himself, but how should he approach him [the man]? He said to himself: if I scare him as I awaken him, he will jump on his rifle and kill me. So he crawled stealthily towards him and picked up the rifle, lifting it very carefully, and retreated a bit and placed it behind him on the ground."<sup>157</sup>

He then took his whip and cracked the man across the body with it. The Gros-Ventre leapt to his feet and Dumont informed him that he could have easily shot him and that had he not been a

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<sup>155</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 39.

<sup>156</sup> *St. Ann's Centennial*, 231.

<sup>157</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 37–38.

“white man”<sup>158</sup> he would have taken that course.<sup>159</sup> Dumont recounts that he sat with the man and offered him his pipe, a symbol of peace and alliance, however, as the man began to smoke shock set in and he began to shake. Dumont returned the rifle to the man and led him down to the horses.

Here Dumont’s version and Monette’s differ. Dumont states that he was worried that the “‘Indians were so cowardly’ he said, ‘I was afraid that as I was bending over, he would shoot me with his own rifle’.”<sup>160</sup> Dumont relates that the man took off at a gallop on his horse and that was the end of the interaction. Alternatively, Monette relates that Dumont passed the gun back to the man and told him that he should return back to his people, handing him a pouch of tobacco (another gift representing peace and alliance). He then told the man to give the tobacco to his chief and to let him know how his whip had felt but that his life had been spared. Dumont later would come upon this man, who had become a chief and told Dumont that he had told his community “that I whipped the white man, and took the tobacco from him. For this brave deed they made me chief.”<sup>161</sup> The choice to create an alliance, as demonstrated through the gift of tobacco, would serve to create an ally in the 1862 negotiations.

Dumont’s memoirs also recount an encounter with an old prisoner at the negotiations in 1862, stating that this Gros-Ventre prisoner had strands of white in his black hair, and was now a grand chief of his nation and was called *Dépouille de Boeuf* (Bull Hide) and that they made fraternal greetings when they saw each other.<sup>162</sup> A thorough investigation into the sources provides evidence to support that this was the same Gros-Ventre that Dumont had encountered before. Denis Combet, translator and editor of the published versions of Dumont’s memoirs, notes that Dumont’s paragraph regarding meeting the Gros-Ventre man is recorded after a paragraph about an incident with a young Blood brave in the original. Combet concludes then that the memoirs must then be regarding the same person (Blood brave) and not a Gros-Ventre in this section despite the original stating it was a Gros-Ventre. However, in comparing this to the

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<sup>158</sup> In Monette’s version of this story Dumont refers to himself as a white man several times, and the Gros-Ventre also refers to him as a white man. It is not clear why this is the term Dumont chose- or if perhaps Monette’s telling of this decades later chose to replace the term Métis with white due to how he was positioning himself within the community at the time this story was recorded. *St. Ann’s Centennial: 100 Years of Faith, Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, Belcourt, North Dakota, 1885-1985 : North Dakota County and Town Histories*, 1985, 231, <http://digitalhorizonsonline.org/cdm/ref/collection/ndsl-books/id/28098>.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 38.

<sup>161</sup> *St. Ann’s Centennial*, 231.

<sup>162</sup> Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont, mémoires*, 39–40.

preceding paragraph which is about this Gros Ventre/Sioux and that this telling is also found in Monette's version, it can be suggested that contrary to Combet's analysis, this is instead a paragraph which relates more to the paragraph which follows, which is about the 1862 negotiations and thus, it is a Gros Ventre (relative of the Dakota Sioux) from the incident described here.<sup>163</sup> Adam Gaudry, in his dissertation, connects these events as being the same person, but interprets it as a Blood brave following George Woodcock's interpretation. The primary sources however state that this is a Gros-Ventre brave, and this aligns with the 1862 negotiations.<sup>164</sup>

Despite the variations, this incident demonstrates Dumont using the threat of force, without an actual act of violence to demand respect. This not only helped build relationships, but also created openings for allies in the future. In essence, he used his reputation as a warrior to create peace.

## 1876

Sir John A. Macdonald had a plan; he envisioned a railroad that would unite the two coasts of Canada. Macdonald knew that to build the railway through to the west coast that treaties would have to be made. The need for the land, the want to avoid violence, the disappearing buffalo and disease made treaties necessary. The numbered treaties began in 1871 and continued through to 1921, covering vast areas of western Canada and the north. Treaty 6 offers unique insight into Dumont's diplomacy a decade after the 1862 treaty due to the recorded eyewitness accounts, and offers several versions of the events.<sup>165</sup>

Negotiations for Treaty 6 can be traced as far back as 1871 when five chiefs, Sweetgrass, Mistawasis, as well as three other chiefs, petitioned the Canadian federal government for a treaty to aid in transitioning towards an agricultural life. This was a request that W. J. Christie, the officer in charge of the Saskatchewan River district for the HBC, felt needed to not be ignored as in previous treaties.<sup>166</sup> The Government was primarily concerned with the Cree who were, in the Government's mind, the primary inhabitants in the area and the biggest concern when it came to

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<sup>163</sup> Footnote 2 by Denis Combet Ibid., 39.

<sup>164</sup> Gaudry, "Kaa-Tiheyimishoyaahk- 'We Are Those Who Own Ourselves': A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870," 147-48; Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont*, 66.

<sup>165</sup> Sheldon Kirk Krasowski, "Mediating the Numbered Treaties: Eyewitness Accounts of Treaties between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples, 1871-1876." (Thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Regina, 2011), 206, <http://ourspace.uregina.ca:8080/xmlui/handle/10294/3575>.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.



a successful railroad. The Cree had also been causing some issues, denying access to a telegraph line crew in 1875 until Governor-Lieutenant Morris and David Laird (Minister of the Interior) promised a treaty.<sup>167</sup> This led to negotiations during the month of July of 1867 and also in October of the same year with several groups: The Plains Cree near Fort Carlton, the Willow Cree near Duck Lake, and the Plains and Woods Cree led by Sweetgrass near Fort Pitt. Poundmaker was also involved, despite not being a chief, but in the role as a headman. Dumont's good friend, John Kerr, who was at the negotiations as a hired man for treaty commissioner James McKay, remarked that Poundmaker's presence was significant during the negotiations. Kerr recounts that the "picturesque Chief 'Poundmaker' was one of the objectors."<sup>168</sup> The Saulteaux and the Assiniboine were also included in the negotiations, though Kerr mentions that the Saulteaux did not want the treaty to occur and along with Chief Beardy of the Willow Cree tried to disrupt the negotiations by preventing the negotiators from travelling across the river at the south branch.<sup>169</sup> Kerr also states that the Saulteaux and Willow Cree tried to convince the "half-breeds" into the disruption but that they were unwilling to join into a fight against the treaty.<sup>170</sup> Quite possibly their unwillingness to join in this disruption was due to their own concerns for land rights and a treaty of their own as had been done in Red River in 1869-70.<sup>171</sup>

Other groups had their own interests involved with the settlement and cession of land to the Government. As previously mentioned, the religious orders also found themselves concerned with the negotiations of the Treaty. Catholic Missionaries were present and were seen as competition by the Methodists who were also in attendance. The two competing groups backed different sides; Bishop Grandin attended in what was rumoured to be an attempt to gain more rights for the Cree and Métis of the area who were practicing Catholics. In opposition was the Anglican Rev. John MacKay, who acted as interpreter for the commissioners and Rev. John Hines who was a witness. MacKay was reported to be an expert speaker of Cree, however Peter Erasmus was hired by the Cree and eventually took over as interpreter for both sides as he spoke

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Kerr, "The Indian Treaties of 1876," 191; Krasowski, "Mediating the Numbered Treaties," 206.

<sup>169</sup> Kerr, "The Indian Treaties of 1876," 188.

<sup>170</sup> Kerr uses the term half-breed and does not designate if this is meaning the French or English population both of which were numerous within Saskatchewan and Treaty 6 area. Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> The 1869-1870 Red River Resistance was an uprising led by mostly Métis community members led by Louis Riel and a provisional government to demand for rights in the creation of what is now known as Manitoba.

Plains Cree, and MacKay did not.<sup>172</sup> There were concerns that MacKay's Cree was not the same dialect as those participating in the Treaty and that that could result in mistranslations for both sides.

The original government orders for Treaty 6 were vague. Laird was hesitant to give Morris instructions other than to state that the terms were "not to exceed those of Treaty no.4, or if possible, should be limited terms granted by Treaty no. 5."<sup>173</sup> The order in council stated that Treaty 6 territory should be based on a trajectory west of Treaty 4 and "not less than fifty miles north of the north branch of the Saskatchewan" and included territories of Crees and Plains Assiniboine.<sup>174</sup> With these goals set out the negotiations began, the above parties taking part as well as the Métis who were present at the signing at Fort Carlton.

Previous treaties saw Métis individuals involved as negotiators and interpreters, and for Treaty 6 Peter Erasmus officially held this position. However, this does not explain the number of Métis who were present during the negotiations, and their signatures on the Treaty. Morris believed in the use of skilled Métis residents as interpreters who were loyal to the Dominion Government as intermediaries, stating:

"that they [Indian Bands] can be retained in close alliance and friendship by treating them fairly, kindly and justly. They should be advised by men they trust, of real meaning of boundary surveys and explanations should be given to them as intended railway surveys; and all stipulations of the treaties should be scrupulously carried out."<sup>175</sup>

Morris suggests that the commissioner should be assigned to draw up the treaty and be assisted by two men native to the country that were able to speak the local dialects and with who the locals had confidence in, and that they should be either of English or French mixed blood. As a result, James McKay was suggested.<sup>176</sup> This was not an unexpected suggestion as Morris had previously used McKay to settle tensions between the Dakota and the Métis in 1873. In addition, the American government, as previously mentioned, used the Métis to negotiate the Dakota

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<sup>172</sup> Krasowski, "Mediating the Numbered Treaties," 210.

<sup>173</sup> David Laird, "Laird to Morris," July 15, 1876, Morris Papers, Archives of Manitoba.

<sup>174</sup> "Order in Council," July 21, 1876, RG10 Volume 3636, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>175</sup> "Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to the Minister of the Interior," January 24, 1874, file 94, Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2M140, reel 7., Saint Boniface Archives.

<sup>176</sup> Allyson Stevenson, "Men of Their Own Blood': Metis Intermediaries and the Numbered Treaties," *Native Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (July 2009): 83.

Sioux's move north.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, the use of messengers in advance of incoming parties in the west where treaties did not exist for peaceful entry was common, until the North West Mounted Police arrived to the area in 1874. These messengers were often Métis. This was also the only method to communicate with First Nations of the area and to monitor the west. It was the local Métis who often filled these positions.<sup>178</sup>

Lieutenant Governor Morris also mentioned the influence of the Métis in the treaties 1,3,4,5 and 6 but did not give specifics in what roles they played in his reports. In Treaty 3 he stated that Chief Mawedopeness declared Morris "owed the Treaty much to the half-breeds."<sup>179</sup> Examination of the period leading up to each treaty reveals that the Métis played critical roles, acting as government diplomats and messengers and in some cases counteracting negative messages.<sup>180</sup> In a report about Prince Albert, Saskatchewan (a settlement of two to four hundred English speaking Métis from Red River) Anglican Rev. John MacKay reported that inhabitants were anxiously awaiting a treaty with the Cree around Fort Carlton so that the land in question could be properly settled. Mackay distinguished between French Métis of the community of St. Laurent, who relied mostly on the buffalo hunt, and the English Métis of Prince Albert, who he declared as mostly agricultural.<sup>181</sup> To MacKay, this was one characteristic that set these two groups apart, ignoring that many of the Métis at St. Laurent, though still-hunting buffalo, were also settling land for agricultural use and were also interested in gaining land titles. Essentially the populations of the French Catholic Métis and the English Protestant Métis within Saskatchewan were as interested in treaties as the First Nation peoples.

By 1876 Gabriel Dumont had been positioned as a leader within his community for over a decade. He had been voted to the position of buffalo hunt chief several times and elected as president of the St. Laurent community which was formally established in 1873. By this time Dumont had gained a reputation as an enforcer of colonial law by the government. Throughout his time as a leader, Dumont developed a relationship with many government officials of mutual respect.

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<sup>177</sup> Allyson Donna Stevenson, "The Metis Cultural Brokers and the Western Numbered Treaties, 1869-1877" (Masters Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2004), 89, <http://ecommons.usask.ca/handle/10388/etd-07102007-132751>.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>181</sup> "Report from Rev. John McKay of Prince Albert to Morris," June 1874, RG 10, Library and Archives Canada.

One example of the federal government agents agreeing with Dumont regarding his enforcement of the traditional laws took place during the spring hunt in 1875, and is retold by both John Kerr and Father André. During the spring hunt of 1875, the brigade voted Gabriel as hunt chief and Rev. Father Fourmound accompanied the group that travelled for twelve days to reach the river *La Biche* and the buffalo. Father André recounts that like many hunts the group gathered upon locating the buffalo and agreed on the rules of the hunt. However, unlike the majority of the members of the hunt, two men, Peter Balendine and Primeau (First name not mentioned), from the St. Laurent area decided to not follow the rules of the hunt as had been agreed upon by the group. Breaking the rules of the hunt, the two men left early to begin the chase, but were returned to the camp by other leaders within the group. Kerr, who was not present at this time, tells that Dumont punished the men with brutality. Father André's version, however, describes how the men exaggerated the punishment in their version of the events told to the agents at the Fort. André recounts that when the offenders were brought back to the camp all but these two were handed their punishments. Dumont, along with the rest of the council, ordered fines to Balendine and Primeau and they were released immediately with the promise that they would head directly to Fort Carlton. The men however, arrived at Fort Carlton and instead of accepting their fines for breaking the hunt rules, filed a complaint against Dumont claiming rough treatment, being robbed, and almost murdered. The men used the rumours that Dumont had organized a provincial government as seen in Red River with Riel to their advantage to gain sympathy for their position at the Fort.<sup>182</sup>

The complaint was filed and Lawrence Clarke, factor of Fort Carlton, wrote about his concerns to Governor-Lieutenant Alexander Morris accusing Dumont of enacting and enforcing laws in a tyrannical nature.<sup>183</sup> Morris ordered Northwest Police officer Sam Steele to Saskatchewan to talk to Dumont and Steele verified that Dumont "had set up a sort of provisional government on the banks of the South Saskatchewan and he claimed independence of the dominion."<sup>184</sup> Major General Selby-Smith, concerned by these reports, invited Dumont to join Steele and himself to discuss the issue and the three "cleared the air" and came to an understanding that Dumont was merely enforcing the laws of the plains that were voted on by the

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<sup>182</sup> Father Alexandre André, "Petite Chronique de St. Laurent," 1894 1871, 8, Oblates Archives, Provincial Archives of Alberta; Sissons, *John Kerr*, 160–61.

<sup>183</sup> Sissons, *John Kerr*, 161.

<sup>184</sup> Samuel B. Steele (Samuel Benfield), *Forty Years in Canada*, 92.

hunt and required for a successful buffalo hunt. Dumont left the meeting in good standing with the local officials and returned to St. Laurent.<sup>185</sup> This event, occurring the year before the negotiations for Treaty 6, demonstrates that despite the concerns of a few, Dumont had established a relationship with the local officials in which there was mutual respect. This event also confirms Dumont's good relationship with the Crown.

John Kerr was witness to Dumont and his family's appearance at the negotiations and signing of Treaty 6 in August of 1876. Kerr recalls that when they arrived at the chosen site for the Treaty, a mile from the Fort, that he saw his "old cronies" Gabriel Dumont, and his brother Eli as well as others of the Métis plains hunters.<sup>186</sup> This would be the last time that Kerr would see Dumont and although Kerr does not give much detail regarding why Dumont and his family was there, this eye-witness account, along with Dumont family members acting as signatories<sup>187</sup> for the Treaty confirm that they were active participants.

Morris referred to the Métis (French and English) generally using their influence and relationship with the First Nations for support of the federal government. This support was used in an effort to create a satisfactory agreement regarding treaties showing that despite some concerns the Crown looked upon the Métis as allies in the region.<sup>188</sup> This lends weight to the argument that the Métis were at the negotiations at the request of the Government, rather than at the request of the Cree or Saulteaux alone. However, the Métis were also there for their own interests, and even Morris acknowledges that despite being mostly on the move, that many of the French Métis were looking to secure their own land and suggests that land should be given to them.<sup>189</sup>

Dumont's presence at Treaty 6 is significant because he represented a growing faction of Métis that were interested in the securing of land for themselves and that they understood that knowledge of the rights, which would be given to the First Nations of the area, could possibly affect the Métis in future negotiations. As well, despite the lack of information on the Métis' involvement in the Treaty, this does not indicate that they were not involved. Previous treaties

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<sup>185</sup> Sissons, *John Kerr*, 161.

<sup>186</sup> Kerr, "The Indian Treaties of 1876," 189; Kerr, "Gabriel Dumont: A Personal Memory," 54; Sissons, *John Kerr*, 223.

<sup>187</sup> "Treaty Six (Transcript) with Images of the Signatures," August 23, 1876, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028710/1100100028783>.

<sup>188</sup> Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories*, 195-96.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

used the Métis as key players in negotiations on both the behalf of the Crown and the First Nations, and their appearance at Treaty 6 was likely for similar reasons. That Métis community members such as Ekapow acted as witnesses and signatories on the Treaty implies their active involvement in the negotiations.

### Conclusion

Taking into consideration the treaties of 1862 and 1876, as well as other diplomatic initiatives, this chapter demonstrates that despite the emphasis in current scholarship on Dumont's prowess in the battlefield, Dumont established himself as a leader through kinship ties that led to his involvement in key diplomatic initiatives well before the events of the 1885 North-West Resistance. His position as hunt chief required him to act as a voice for his community, which was seen in his involvement in the 1862 negotiations with the Dakota Sioux. Further, although the Métis participation in the negotiations of Treaty 6 may not be as clear, it can be assumed that Dumont acted in customary fashion to other treaties during the same time period. As a Métis leader, he would have had the opportunity to work as an intermediary, while also establishing rights for his own community.

### Chapter 3- Community: St. Laurent de Grandin

By 1870 Métis society was well into a transitional period, where prairie *hivernant* (wintering) camps became more permanent and settler societies began to embed the landscape. In this same year the Red River district concluded its claims with the Canadian Government and the first land scrips<sup>190</sup> were awarded to the Métis of Manitoba with the end of the Red River Resistance.<sup>191</sup>

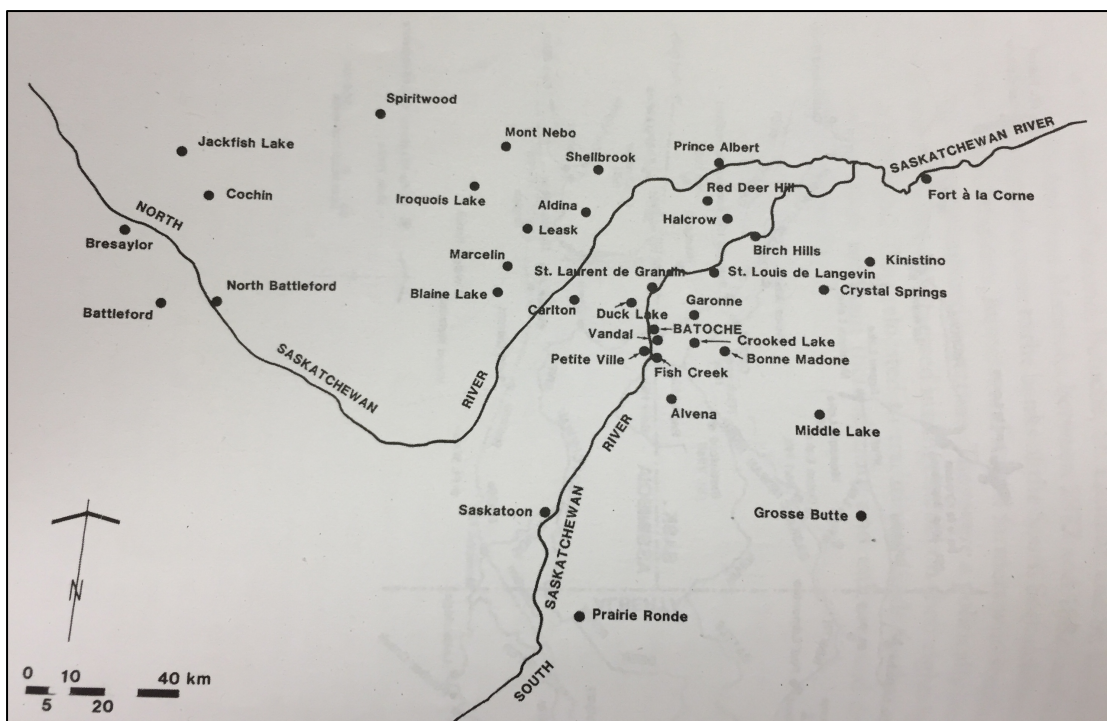
While the community at Red River had been farming for several years, many who had remained hunters reluctantly acknowledged that the diminishing bison would force them to consider a more sedentary lifestyle as well. Gabriel Dumont's brigade was part of this resistant group.

Consequently, Dumont and fellow Métis hunters built new homes, ploughed the lands, established farms and businesses, while continuing to hunt as long as the buffalo remained. In contrast to their Manitoba kin, these Saskatchewan Métis communities worked the with no land rights from the federal government despite the gains made in Red River. This chapter explores this process of Métis settlement governance in what would become Saskatchewan through the community of St. Laurent de Grandin and the leadership of Gabriel Dumont. Further, it calls attention to the often-overlooked petitions from this community and others to preserve Métis rights, land and recognition from the Canadian government.

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<sup>190</sup> Scrip was a certificate that was redeemable for cash or land. The Crown saw the scrip as a way to extinguish of aboriginal rights of the Métis on an individual basis in trade for

<sup>191</sup> The 1869-1870 Red River Resistance resulted in the formation of the province of Manitoba and the area's Métis gaining land scrip. More information can be found in the following and numerous other sources: Manitoba Métis Federation, *Riverlots and Scrip: Elements of Métis Aboriginal Rights*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Metis Federation, 1978); W. L. Morton (William Lewis), *Contexts of Canada's Past*, Carleton Library ; No. 123 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980); Peter Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, Rev. ed.. (Toronto: NC Press, 1978); Charles Arkoll Boulton, *I Fought Riel : A Military Memoir*, 2nd ed., Bonnycastle, R. H. G. (Richard Henry Gardyne), 1903-1968. Richard Bonnycastle Book ; 3 (Toronto: Lorimer, 1985); Collins Edmund) J. E. (Joseph, *The Story of Louis Riel: The Rebel Chief ...* (Toronto: Rose Publishing Company, 1885); Thomas Flanagan, *Louis "David" Riel: Prophet of the New World* (Halifax, N.S.: Goodread Biography, 1983); George Francis Gillman. Stanley, *Louis Riel : Patriot or Rebel?*, Irene M. Spry Collection of Western Canadian History (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1954); George Francis Gillman Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (London: Longmans, Green and co, 1936); William McCartney. Davidson, *The Life and Times of Louis Riel* (Calgary: The Albertan, 1951).



Métis Communities on North and South Saskatchewan River<sup>192</sup>

Little research exists on St. Laurent, which was across the Saskatchewan River from the famous town of Batoche, and the leadership and governance of this Métis hub. St. Laurent's histories are couched in the larger North-West Resistance narrative. In addition, just as the Batoche and St. Laurent settlements began to merge into one community, so too do their histories. Historian Diane Payment's two monographs focusing on Batoche cover the early formation of St. Laurent in a general sense giving only two brief paragraphs to the founding of the settlement.<sup>193</sup> Similarly, George Woodcock's *Gabriel Dumont* includes a short description of the beginning of St. Laurent and Dumont's involvement with the community.<sup>194</sup> Neither of these delve into the particular process that transpired as the community transformed from a semi-permanent *hivernant* into a long-term settlement. Through this historical lens, the tensions that arose in response to this transition and the way that the Métis utilized their established buffalo hunt governmental structure to respond to these issues come to light.

<sup>192</sup> Payment, *The Free People - Otipemisiwak*, 30.

<sup>193</sup> Payment, *The Free People - Otipemisiwak*; Payment, *Batoche (1870-1910)*.

<sup>194</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and His Lost World*.



The most valuable primary sources informing this chapter are found in the Oblate records of the Catholic Church Archives.<sup>195</sup> Within this collection is the often overlooked journal *Petite Chronique de St. Laurent*. Written by Father André, the *Chronique* contains detailed accounts of the activities taking place at the St. Laurent mission.<sup>196</sup> While working for Parks Canada at the Batoche Historic Site, historian Diane Payment discovered the *Chronique* and used it in her research on Batoche.<sup>197</sup> Similarly, Don McLean, author of *1885 Metis Rebellion or Government Conspiracy?*, also uses this primary source in a limited way. McLean refers to the *Chronique* twice, to verify the name of an eastern newspaper (*Toronto Tribune*) regarding its publishing of rumours of an uprising as well as to quote Father André regarding Dumont's decision to fine two men as described in Chapter Two of this thesis.<sup>198</sup> Finally, Historians R.C. MacCleod and Bob Beal also used the *Petite Chronique* to discuss the founding of St. Laurent, to verification of its location, and Father André's declaration that the St. Laurent government was dissolved. This research is reflected in their publication *Prairie Fire* about the 1885 North-West Resistance and encompasses two pages.<sup>199</sup>

Thus far, and with these few examples in mind, *Le Petite Chronique de St. Laurent* has been underused by historians. For many, it may be a consequence of the fact so few scholars have focused their studies on St. Laurent.<sup>200</sup> This chapter, therefore, offers an original contribution to the history of the Métis by incorporating the *Petit Chronique* as a main source for this research. In addition, by looking at the ways that the Métis created community at St. Laurent specifically, rather than a side-bar to Batoche or the North-West Resistance, we can also come to understand how Gabriel Dumont exercised his leadership. Finally, this chapter highlights the nature of Métis governance at St. Laurent, arguing that it was an adaptation of the long established buffalo hunt, rather than a reflection of European style governance.

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<sup>195</sup> Oblates Archives, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.; Rev. Father J. Le Chevallier O.M.I., *Saint-Laurent de Grandin: A Mission & a Shrine in the North-West of America* (Lafoyle and J. De Lamarelle Printers, 1930).

<sup>197</sup> Payment has used this source in both her publications on the Métis. In her short introduction to St. Laurent on the chapter on Métis society and way of life as well as within the chapter regarding relationships with the clergy. The French monograph Batoche utilizes this source in the chapter on St. Laurent de Grandin which covers two pages giving a brief overview to the establishment of the settlement. Payment, *The Free People - Otipemisiwak*; Payment, Batoche (1870-1910).

<sup>198</sup> Donald George. McLean, *1885, Metis Rebellion or Government Conspiracy?*, Irene M. Spry Collection of Western Canadian History (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1985), 39-40.

<sup>199</sup> Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 41-43.

<sup>200</sup> That the *Chronique* is in French and a translation does not exist may also prevent some scholars from fully using this source.

## Settlement

On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1871 a meeting was held at the house of the missionary and Mr. Clarke, a bourgeois in charge of Fort Carlton, and it was decided that the Métis should found a permanent settlement near Fort Carlton. Ten men were chosen under the guidance of Father André to search for the best location. The team delayed the search until spring when the weather improved enough to allow for proper scouting of the land. In the end, they decided on a site along the bank of the Saskatchewan River. A second expedition took place in May of 1872, where they confirmed the establishment of a community on the south branch of the Saskatchewan. In addition, they determined that the settlement would be limited to both sides of the river bank; ten miles below and above an *hivernant* that was already in use. Further, Duck Lake would also be included within the boundaries of this projected settlement.

Once the location was confirmed other details could be made. It was agreed for instance, that the Oblate mission would become part of the community under the authorization of Bishop Monseigneur Vital-Justin Grandin who visited the settlement in 1873. The name St. Laurent de Grandin was decided on, naming it after the Catholic Saint Lawrence<sup>201</sup> and under the permission of Bishop Grandin.<sup>202</sup> They established the settlement within a year and 322 Métis took up residence in the area.<sup>203</sup>

By December 1873 the settlement determined that a set of rules regarding the organization of the community was needed. Father André's introduction to the document states that this was decided because there was a lack of governmental structure in the region and tensions due to the number of people living together required a new concept to rule over themselves.<sup>204</sup> Although one might assume that this urge to organize government is a reflection of European style political structures, put within the context of Métis history and culture, this initiative was more likely consistent with protocols of the hunt.

The Métis were used to initiating a set of rules for every new hunt, electing new officials and then following their democratic lead. The rules were always established through a consensus as done in the hunt. This was not a new governmental structure modeled after the western

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<sup>201</sup> Shrines and settlements named after the Saint Lawrence had several spelling variations including Laurent.

<sup>202</sup> André, "Petite Chronique de St. Laurent," 2.

<sup>203</sup> "Census 1871-1872," 72 1871, M477, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>204</sup> "Copy of the Laws and Regulations Established for the Colony of St. Laurent on the Saskatchewan," 1873, St. Laurent on the Saskatchewan, Copy of the Laws and Regulations Established for the Colony of St., Metis Museum/ Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/12631>.

European system that Canada utilized, but rather an application of a long held system to the new more permanent *hivernant*. The number of Métis in the settlement made the need for laws more vital than in previous *hivernant* areas, where only a few families would usually winter together. The smaller less permanent *hivernants* allowed less structure to be needed to resist tensions in the community. In the introduction to the laws and regulations by Father André also states that this establishment of a set of laws was in no way to create themselves as an independent state, but it is instead a response to the ways of country life and necessary to keep the peace.<sup>205</sup> This comment was likely in reaction to the situation three years before in which Louis Riel established a provisional government at Red River. St. Laurent was, therefore, and according to André, not a copy of the Red River community, but rather an example of Métis customs of governance transformed to address the issues occurring in their transition to an agricultural lifestyle.

#### From Buffalo Hunt Chief to St. Laurent President

Alexander Ross states that the Buffalo Chief “was styled the great war chief or head of the camp; and on all public occasions he occupied the place of president.”<sup>206</sup> Thus, Dumont, as buffalo hunt chief in his early years, was an ideal candidate to fill the new role of “President” for the St. Laurent community. This position mirrored the responsibilities of the hunt chief. The laws state that the president, as well as the councillors, was “empowered to judge all cases that shall be brought before them. The chief, by advice of his Council can convoke the general assemblies...”<sup>207</sup> This reading of the laws of St. Laurent and the use of both the titles of president and chief demonstrates the direct development of this role as President from that of hunt chief. He was not only in charge of leading the community (just as he had led the camp), but also took on the role as protector or “great war chief.” Taking this into consideration, the context in which Dumont engaged with the North-West Resistance is understandable. It was not due to a lust for violence, but rather a duty bestowed on him as the St. Laurent President in 1873. In addition, eight councillors were elected including: Jean Dumont, Alexander Hamelin, Baptiste Gurriepy, Pierre Gurriepy, Abraham Montour, Moyse Mealet (Moïse Oulette), and Baptiste

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ross, *The Red River Settlement: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State, with Some Account of the Native Races and Its General History to the Present Day*, 248.

<sup>207</sup> “12631.St. Laurent on the Saskatchewan, Copy of the Laws and Regulations Established for the Colony of St.,” 1, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/12631.St.%20Laurent%20on%20the%20Saskatchewan,%20Copy%20of%20the%20Laws%20and%20Regulations%20Established%20for%20the%20Colony%20of%20St.>

Hamelin.<sup>208</sup> Scholars such as George Woodcock have assumed that the “Jean” and “Isidore” listed were Dumont’s cousin and brother, however Ska-kas-ta-ow and Ekapow were also in the area as shown by the 1872 census and local histories. Taking this into consideration, it may have been them on the council as they were two of the first to settle in the area.<sup>209</sup> And, as discussed in chapter one of this thesis, both Ekapow and Ska-kas-ta-ow were prominent leaders in their communities throughout their lifetime. As well the Dumont family often lived in similar areas during periods of their life acting in leadership roles. This demonstrates that family, not just individuals were a vital part of leadership that it took more than an individual to bring stability to a community and that kinship was an essential ingredient in Métis culture.

Allegiance to the community was of utmost importance and Father André wrote that those gathered at the meeting wanted an oath taken by the council, the council countered that they would take the oath only if those present also took an oath to support the council and aid in the keeping of the laws. The oath was taken by both groups and witnessed by Father André (who noted that he was not trained as a civic person but was willing to witness the oath).<sup>210</sup> The oath demonstrated the communal concept of governmental structure within the settlement. The council did not have an all-encompassing power, they understood their roles as elected representatives of the community and that their positions were only there due to the support of the community.

The laws emphasized the importance of the position of the councillor, establishing fines for missed meetings. The hierarchy of the council closely resembled that of the buffalo hunt, captain and soldiers were assigned as in a hunt and respect to the council was required. The laws were very specific and were a clear response to issues previously found within the hunt or *hivernant* society. A law regarding the borrowing of horses was established within this first meeting.<sup>211</sup> There were 577 horses in the settlement in 1872. The Dumont family owned several horses each, Gabriel owned ten, Ekapow had twenty horses, Isidore Jr., Ska-kas-ta-ow and Jean Jr. each owned eighteen horses.<sup>212</sup> This placed a proportionately large amount of the horses in the community in the Dumont family. Possibly this law, which is established to negate issues regarding horse ownership was enacted due to the wishes of those who had several horses. Horses were a vital part of the buffalo hunt community; a successful hunter required a fast horse

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<sup>208</sup> “Copy of the Laws and Regulations Established for the Colony of St. Laurent on the Saskatchewan.”

<sup>209</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont : The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, 96.

<sup>210</sup> “Copy of the Laws and Regulations Established for the Colony of St. Laurent on the Saskatchewan.”

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> “Census 1871-1872.”

that was well trained, and many had pride over their horses and horses were considered a source of wealth.

John Kerr tells of a story that demonstrates the pride that hunters like Gabriel had in their horses. During one of the hunts that Kerr accompanied Dumont on, a Cree woman joined the hunt after her husband was injured and unable to participate. After the hunt the evening conversation turned to how fast her horse was, especially for being ridden by the first woman that Isidore had ever seen participate in a hunt. “She has a very fast runner,” Kerr responded, “there’s nothing else as fast in the whole camp-unless the big pinto that the Cree owns.”<sup>213</sup> Gabriel’s ego was unable to take the ribbing from Kerr and he insisted that there were several horses just as fast in the camp including two of his own. This friendly banter resulted in a decision to run a race, bets were made and Kerr donated a prize of a bag of fine grease pemmican. Gabriel’s brothers Petite Jean and Eli Dumont rode Gabriel’s horses and lost against the Cree woman. Gabriel was chagrined at being beaten by someone else, especially a woman, and was teased about it endlessly taking it all in good humour in the days after.<sup>214</sup> This story showcases how much pride and value was given to having a good hunting horse. They were not only essential to the Métis’ ability to hunt and were considered a source of wealth, but also the quality of horse was a sense of pride for each hunter.

Despite the fact that the horses ran loose within the community, ownership was known; horses were not a commodity of the community. The St. Laurent laws also established rules regarding dogs and horses, especially when it came to the killing of foals by dogs. A horse being killed by a dog was a loss of potential income for the owner, as well as a loss of a symbol of prosperity. Each horse had value and these laws protected this.<sup>215</sup> These regulations, when placed into the context of the other ordinances created at the meeting demonstrate the importance of the horse to the Métis people.

The laws established at the December meeting set out a series of fines and financial requirements for the community. Fines would be placed against the president, captains, and any soldiers who refused to participate according to the rules of the council. Failure to attend meetings or follow orders set out by someone higher on the council hierarchy resulted in fines

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<sup>213</sup> Sissons, *John Kerr*, 99.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 96–100.

<sup>215</sup> “Copy of the Laws and Regulations Established for the Colony of St. Laurent on the Saskatchewan.”

ranging from three to five louis.<sup>216</sup> Financial deposits were also required to file complaints with the council; this establishment of a deposit was likely to help prevent false cases, or nuisance claims, from being filed and encouraged the community to sort out issues amongst themselves first when possible. The deposit stated to be left “with the president to remunerate him and the members of the Council for their loss of time but at the termination of the case the person losing it shall pay all the costs and the plaintiff if he (blank) shall receive back the money deposited.”<sup>217</sup> This deposit system would establish a system of trust; community members would be less likely to bring forward cases with no cause to harass other community members, and the council could trust that complaints brought forward likely had valid merit. As well this use of monetary fines and deposits also demonstrates that the Métis community was not a community that was poor at the time of the founding of St. Laurent despite the insistence of colonial powers such as the Church insisting that they were impoverished.<sup>218</sup> They were a community of successful people, who had forged a life that kept them away from hunger, starvation, and poverty. This use of financial fines and deposits demonstrates that the majority of community members were financially stable enough for this system to be effective.

### The Businessman

Although Gabriel and his family used the hunt as their primary means of supporting their families, it was rarely their only business initiative. Ekapow, his father, was known to take on work as a freighter, and after Gabriel was born the family was settled near Red River 1838-1840 to farm and sell pemmican. Ekapow and his brothers, as discussed in chapter one, also worked as guides for explorers. The family never relied on hunting alone to provide subsistence for their families.

Gabriel continued with this tradition of multiple venues of income when the wintering *hivernant* at St. Laurent became more permanent. He began his own businesses, developing a ferry to cross the Saskatchewan River as well as operating a small store on his property. By 1875 Gabriel's ferry was established and he received the business for the teams exploring on behalf of

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<sup>216</sup> The French Louis d'or was one of several coins in circulation whose values varied widely over time with changes in their gold or silver content, inflation etc. The Louis d'or ranged from 10 livres in 1640 to 54 livres in 1720 James Powell, *A History of the Canadian Dollar* (Ottawa: Bank of Canada, 2005), 3, [http://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/dollar\\_book.pdf](http://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/dollar_book.pdf).

<sup>217</sup> “Copy of the Laws and Regulations Established for the Colony of St. Laurent on the Saskatchewan,” 2.

<sup>218</sup> Father André refers to the “pauvres Métis/Poor Métis” who required charity of good pastors when the buffalo hunts began to fail in the period of the formation of St. Laurent. Father Alexandre André, “Petite Chronique de St. Laurent,” 1894-1871, 10, Oblates Archives, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

the Canadian Pacific Railway.<sup>219</sup> The ferry was a major source of income for Dumont, and operated until the battles in 1885. The operation of ferries was controlled under a set of ordinances placed by the federal government. The ordinance controlled the prices for any freight carried by the ferry as well as ensured that each licensed ferry was the only one operating for a set distance along the river. As the only way to cross the river in the area the license established the ferry as a necessary way of transport in the area.<sup>220</sup> Gabriel understood the laws and ordinances and worked within the constraints set out by the federal government in the operation of his ferry. Dumont demonstrated his understanding and willingness to work within the restrictions of the law through his letters to lieutenant-governor David Laird regarding obtaining a license.<sup>221</sup> This letter demonstrates his respect to the federal government and its laws, but despite this additional fees were requested from Dumont than was described in the ordinance. Dumont was required to place a \$1000.00 surety, paid by two people, five hundred dollars each, on Dumont's behalf. The license itself has a space for this bond to be entered, but it is not listed as a requirement in the ordinance.<sup>222</sup> Dumont wrote to Laird regarding obtaining a ferry license and agreed to the requirements as explained by Laird in his response, which stated the requirements of the ordinance as well as that of the surety.<sup>223</sup> Laird does not explain if this fee was required of all ferry operators or if this was a requirement only for Dumont. The fee for the ferry license was only four dollars covering three years of protection for the service of the ferry in that location. There were no fees to be paid to the government outside of the licence fee. The surety was a deposit against penalties that may be brought against the ferry operator. With such a small license fee it can be assumed that the penalties brought against an operator were likely not large fees and not be in the amount of the surety. Thus it is not clear why such a high surety was required of Dumont.

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<sup>219</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont : The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, 71.

<sup>220</sup> "An Ordinance Respecting Ferries," September 26, 1878, • S-NWT.0 Northwest Council 1870-1902 microfilm 5.515 reel 1, Saskatchewan Archives Board; "An Ordinance Respecting Ferries," August 6, 1884, • S-NWT.0 Northwest Council 1870-1902 microfilm 5.515 reel 1, Saskatchewan Archives Board; "Ordinance Respecting Ferries," September 26, 1879, •S-NWT.0 Northwest Council 1870-1902 microfilm 5.515 reel 1, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

<sup>221</sup> Gabriel Dumont, "Letter Gabriel Dumont to David Laird," February 12, 1878, R 195-3, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

<sup>222</sup> David Laird, "Ferry License," March 1, 1881, R 195-3, Sask archives Board; David Laird, "Ferry License 1878," March 1, 1878, r 195-3, Sask archives Board.

<sup>223</sup> David Laird, "Letter from Laird to Dumont Regarding Ferry License Application," February 11, 1878, R 195-3, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

Records show that the deposit was paid twice on Dumont's behalf. Antoine Ferguson and François Laberge provided the deposit in 1878. Then, in 1881, the surety was paid by Johnny Ross (farmer) and Alexandre Campion (farmer).<sup>224 225</sup> These were men who were willing to place a large deposit on Gabriel's behalf, demonstrating that he was respected and seen as trustworthy within the community. As well, the ability to arrange community members who were able to provide such grand sums demonstrates that the Métis of St. Laurent were not poor as some records choose to depict the community. Though the Métis had been primarily a hunt-based economy they had established a history of farming, and taking on other jobs such as guiding and trading to support their families. St. Laurent was not unusual in its development and settlement, but demonstrates that many Métis were recognizing the need to increase their non-hunt based economic activities as they saw the end of the fur trade and the buffalo hunt in their future.

Gabriel was actively involved in creating businesses for his family that allowed him to diversify away from the hunt alone for income. His ferry was successful, enough so that he was able to purchase and maintain a billiards table within his small store that was located near his ferry, and was not the only billiards table in the area.<sup>226</sup> This demonstrates a community that was able to support themselves and purchase luxuries such as the billiards table. The Métis population took care of their own members, and the inhabitants would have supported those that may not have been as successful in times of need. Though the individual had property and financial success, the residents worked as a cohesive group to ensure the survival of all members. The community understood that they needed title to their land from the federal government before immigrants entered the area to ensure the continued success of the settlement and the members within, and began to petition the Crown for the title to their land.

Father André's account in the *Petite Chronique* describes the Métis as both spiritually and financially poor, stating that their petitions for land title also demonstrated that they were in need of help and transitioning to the agricultural life. "Poor Metis! If they finally understood the charity of the good priests who would like at all costs to reunite them under their beneficent

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<sup>224</sup> Laird, "Ferry License 1878"; Laird, "Ferry License."

<sup>225</sup> It should be noted that the last names are not clear on the copy of the license in the archive and this is my belief what the names are.

<sup>226</sup> Macleod, "Biography – DUMONT, GABRIEL – Volume XIII (1901-1910) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography."



Houlette so that they can find in the true practice of religion and in a laborious and serious life the happiness that they seek in vain far from the cross of the mission or the church.”<sup>227</sup>

This, however, may not be an accurate representation of the Métis’ situation when they first began to request title for their land. The census for 1871-72 notes that most of the Métis families in the area owned an average of ten horses and records that all of the hunters made no less than £100 sterling since June 1st and many of them were earning between £200-500 sterling in that same period.<sup>228</sup> Though not much information on the cost of living on the prairies is available in this time period, the information gathered in 1870 by J.N. Larned allows some insight into how the Métis compared to other people within Canada. His figures show that most labourers earned \$1.00–\$2.50 per day of work.<sup>229</sup> The British pound was worth approximately \$5.45 American dollars.<sup>230</sup> Thus, the Métis of St. Laurent, earning an average of £100 in a six month period, would be earning an average of just over half a pound a day, or over \$3.00 American a day. This situates the St. Laurent community earning above the wages of those who were working as labourers in the Eastern provinces, and unlike those working within cities they were able to trade, and grow much of their own food.

### Petitions

The Métis of the North West Territories realized that as they moved to a more agricultural lifestyle, and the buffalo hunt began to wane, receiving title to their land was a necessity. Yet, these Métis communities were not receiving title to the land as was being done in Manitoba. With these concerns in mind, the Métis of St. Laurent approached the federal government through a series of petitions asking for action and acknowledgement of their concerns.

#### *St. Laurent and Duck Lake*

In 1881 the Métis of Duck Lake and St. Laurent drafted a petition to the federal government, which was written and sent by Father André. André travelled to North Battleford to personally deliver the petition that established not only his own concerns but also the grievances

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<sup>227</sup> This translation is my own. The original states: “Pauvre métis! S'ils comprenaient enfin la charité des bons pasteurs qui voudraient à tout prix les réunir sous leur houlette biefaisante pour leur faire trouver dans la vraie pratique de la religion et dans un vie laborieuse et sérieuse le bonheur qu'ils cherchaient en vain loin de la croix de la mission ou de l'église paroissiale.” André, “Petite Chronique de St. Laurent,” 10.

<sup>228</sup> “Census 1871-1872.”

<sup>229</sup> J.G. Snell, “The Cost of Living in Canada in 1870,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 12, no. 23 (1979): 188.

<sup>230</sup> “Measuring Worth - Measures of Worth, Inflation Rates, Saving Calculator, Relative Value, Worth of a Dollar, Worth of a Pound, Purchasing Power, Gold Prices, GDP, History of Wages, Average Wage,” accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www.measuringworth.com/datasets/exchangepond/result.php>.

of the Métis residents. The petition stated that there were constant disputes and difficulties due to the limits and lack of rights regarding property in the country and the lack of proper authority to settle the land. They were concerned that the land was almost entirely surveyed in the Electoral District of Lorne however it had been two years since the surveys, the land office has been established for four years in Prince Albert, and yet the land agent was still not authorized to enter claims for patents. The Métis who were settling lands had no way to legally secure the lands that they had been holding, developing, and living on. Father André had personal concern over this lack of legal title, as he had fenced two hundred acres and though it was respected as Catholic Church's land by most of the community someone had built a house on the land taking almost half of the property away from the Church, and the church had no legal recourse.<sup>231</sup> The question of title to land was not just ignored towards the Métis but to everyone who had settled the district.

On March 7<sup>th</sup> 1883, Gabriel Dumont, as chairman for the St. Laurent parish Métis, and Alexander Fisher as secretary, sent a follow up letter to the Governor General, informing him that in a meeting on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1883 a resolution was made regarding several issues. The St. Laurent parish Métis were writing to demonstrate their hope to develop their education system by establishing schools in chief centres of the territories, requesting an allowance of five dollars per head for each child up to a limit of two hundred dollars. This would be added to voluntary subscriptions, and in many localities render it possible to build and operate a school that would otherwise not exist. They requested scrip, for all the heads of families and their children who had not previously received scrip in Manitoba so they can have rights to land.<sup>232</sup> The letter continued that the Métis found themselves in a sudden transition from the "prairie life" to an agricultural life due to a combination of the disappearance of the buffalo as well as the hunting ordinance of the North-West Council. This change had diminished the petitioners' ability to support themselves and compelled them to ask for this help in beginning to farm.<sup>233</sup> The community asked for the same aid as was granted to foreign immigrants settling in Manitoba.<sup>234</sup>

The petition also stated that the North West Territories was for the greater part composed of "French half-breeds" with no magistrate who spoke their language, and so they were resolved

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<sup>231</sup> "Copy of Petition from Reverend Father André of Duck Lake to His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor in Council," June 14, 1881, Department of the Interior, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

<sup>232</sup> Canada Dept of the Secretary of State, *Epitome of Parliamentary Documents in Connection with the North-West Rebellion, 1885* (Maclean, Roger & Company, 1886), 317.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

to produce this “humble petition” to the Governor General requesting that two members of the North West Territories Council be appointed under the act of 1875 and be selected from the oldest residents of the country and for one of them to be a “French half-breed” to protect the justice to the petitioners race.<sup>235</sup> This request demonstrates that the St. Laurent Métis were not wishing to establish their own government, but to work with, and be represented within the federal governmental structures. They believed that as a primary inhabitant to the district, and through the many times they worked for the government, that they deserved representation. This request shows not a population of Métis aiming to work against the federal government, but instead people who wanted representation in the structures being established to govern the area.

St. Laurent was not the only community that petitioned the federal government for land rights during this period. The following examples explore the petitions sent from different areas of what would become modern Saskatchewan. From 1870 through 1885 many people, primarily Métis sent petitions. The petitions reveal that, for the people of the region, lack of title to land was a major concern, and that they received little to no response to their concerns from the Crown’s agents.

#### *Lake Qu’Appelle*

In 1874 the Lake Qu’Appelle area Métis began petitioning the government, just four years after the Red River Resistance that took place in 1870. Moïse Ouellette was one of the signatories for this petition, and had been one of the original councillors in St. Laurent, as well as Gabriel’s brother-in-law. The petition asked for rights to the land they had already settled and to take on land alongside the Qu’Appelle River. The petition requested rights to hunt and fish in cooperation with the First Nations of the area, the right to trade, and for the Roman Catholic Missionaries to freely participate in their community. As well the petition requested that the federal government, in consultation with “Indians and Half-breeds”, create a set of laws for hunting buffalo and wintering camps.<sup>236</sup>

In 1881 a petition was also sent to the federal government from the Qu’Appelle area Métis. The petition stated that the buffalo had disappeared leaving the group in a state of destitution and they wished for help in getting started in farming. The Qu’Appelle area community sent a follow up petition in 1882, petitioning again to have land along the river, on

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 292.

which they had been settled since 1860. They reminded the government that in 1879 they had built a church and school, and a survey had occurred finding some of the railroad land owned by government on land that they already had settled. The group had been notified that they needed to purchase the land or move, and they wanted to discuss these claims with the Minister of the Interior, to not only gain title but to negotiate the issue of the railroad land.<sup>237</sup> Records do not indicate any responses had been sent to this group after their first petitions, and this lack of response was the reason for their repeated requests to the Crown.

### *Blackfoot Crossing*

The Blackfoot Crossing Métis also created a petition for rights in 1877. The written demand was submitted by a group, which included Jean-Baptiste Dumont (Ska-Kas-ta-ow), and was sent in September of the year. The petition asked for title to their settled land and for aid in situating themselves as farmers. The community's exposure to small pox in 1870 had devastated them and they had not recovered; it was due to this epidemic that they requested help from the federal government to make the transition to farming. As Treaty 6, signed the year before the petition and Treaty 7 signed the same year, each had included provisions for farming equipment and training for the involved First Nations, the Métis were likely hoping for similar aid. As the Canadian government was, as demonstrated with the treaties, attempting to have Indigenous peoples begin farming the Métis were only asking for aid that had been promised to other groups.<sup>238</sup>

The Blackfoot Crossing settlement was made up of approximately one thousand Métis at the time of the petition and was dealing with increased tensions within the community. Unlike the St. Laurent group, this community had no rules agreed upon for land when first settled. As such issues were created as they attempted to farm more land and encroached on each other's holdings. As well, the settled land was being impinged on by white settlers despite the Métis having used the land from before the transfer of the region from the HBC to the Dominion of Canada.<sup>239</sup>

### *Cypress Hills*

In September of 1878 the Cypress Hills Métis also created a petition asking for land and aid from the Crown. The petition relayed their concerns about the recent laws regarding hunting

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 314–15.

<sup>238</sup> "Treaty Six (Transcript) with Images of the Signatures."

<sup>239</sup> State, *Epitome of Parliamentary Documents in Connection with the North-West Rebellion, 1885*, 292–93.

restrictions in which they saw more restrictions than the First Nations groups surrounding them. They felt these restrictions were causing their community to be on the brink of starvation. The petition used rhetoric that was likely aimed to appeal to the Crown by demonstrating by mimicking the verbiage used by the colonial powers. The petition stated that the people would like to adopt a life “more conformable to true civilization.”<sup>240</sup> This rhetoric implies an understanding that their current lifestyle was not civilized, and thus inferior in the eyes of the federal government, utilizing the colonizers’ language in an attempt to receive a response to their requests. While likely not believing that their hunt lifestyle was inferior, this word choice was used to appeal to the Crown by demonstrating a wish to take on a lifestyle which was more in the lines of the government’s goals of assimilation. For the Métis it was merely an altering of their current lifestyle and culture to ensure their survival. The Cypress Hills community wished to be permitted to gain title to their land, rights to hunt as the law allowed the First Nations of the area, and a waiver against taxes for several years. This would allow them to establish a farming community and lift themselves from the state of destitution they were currently in. The Dumont family was again represented in this petition, with Ekapow (Isidore Dumont Sr.), Isidore Dumont Jr., and Isidore Dumont listed as part of the petition.<sup>241</sup>

#### *St. Antoine de Padue*

The next year, in 1882, the St. Antoine de Padue area Métis, located along the Saskatchewan River between St. Laurent and Batoche, created a petition and was delivered by Gabriel Dumont who was acting as their spokesperson. The group begins the petition by stating that they were in the district of Prince Albert, NWT and were in a painful position regarding their settled land. They had been forced to move as the hunt no longer supported their community and as such had settled on the south branch of the Saskatchewan River. The community continued that they had been actively clearing the land to prepare for farming in the coming spring, and as some lands had been already surveyed and sold they occupied only the lands that had not yet been surveyed. The Métis of this community were surprised when the surveyors informed them that they must pay for the land they already occupied. The Métis stated that they were too poor to afford the two-dollar an acre price, but they wished to remain close together, to aid in their goal

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>241</sup> Dumon or Dumond was a common spelling of the Dumont family name. Canada Dept of the Secretary of State, *Epitome of Parliamentary Documents in Connection with the North-West Rebellion, 1885* (Maclean, Roger & Company, 1886), 299.

of securing a school and church. As such they appealed to the government's sense of justice they "beg [the Government] to reassure them speedily by directing that they will not be disturbed of their lands and that the government will grant privilege of considering us occupants of even numbered sections since they already occupied them."<sup>242</sup> Records do not indicate the financial status of this group at the time of this petition, whether they were in economically difficult times due to the end of the buffalo hunt no longer subsidizing their livelihood. Potentially their appeal to not pay for the land was because not all members could afford it in the community, but also may have been because they were hoping to avoid paying, as they did not believe they should pay for land they settled, when those in Manitoba eventually received scrip for their land for free.

#### *St. Louis de Langevin*

In 1880 the St. Louis de Langevin Métis also sent a petition to the government requesting a survey of land into river lots as done in Prince Albert. A follow up petition was sent in November of 1883 and the St. Louis de Langevin community mentions that several petitions had been sent in the three years since the original. Father Leduc had been sent as a delegate to Ottawa by the people of Edmonton and St. Albert and had received a promise of a survey on the land in the area. The petitioners were concerned, that despite this promise, no survey had yet happened. Dumont family member, Ambroise Dumont, was listed as a petitioner in the St. Louis de Langevin community showing the Dumont families involvement in more prairie communities asking for title to their land.<sup>243</sup>

#### Petitions as Proof

Exploration of these petitions reveals several important trends. In general, it should be noted that the petitions described are the ones representing the French and Catholic Métis communities as well as the English-speaking population around Prince Albert and surrounding areas.<sup>244</sup> The concerns over land and lack of response from the government were worrisome to a large portion of the long-term inhabitants of the Territories. The petitions were sent over a period of years and, the requests for legal title for the land with the Dominion of Canada was done with great patience. The communities stated their concerns, requesting only a response. Sadly, they were overwhelmingly met with silence.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 311–12.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 294.

Despite the lack of engagement from the Canadian government, the Métis did have some support within the federal government. David Laird, Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories, was in support of many of the requests of the Métis, particularly those from the St. Laurent community. In a letter to the Minister of Interior David Mills, Laird expressed support for most of the requests, including the request for a member on the council. He wrote that appointing someone from that community could help avoid disputes between the established inhabitants, such as the Métis, and the new incoming settlers. As well, Laird stressed that the request for farming implements was similar to the Blackfoot Crossing petition and he had recommended favourable consideration for it from the government.<sup>245</sup> In his response Mills asked Laird to tell the petitioners that their request would be forwarded to the Governor General in Council, and that if new council members were elected he would also forward that request. Records indicate that Mills had been contemplating a way to create an Act that would allow the petitioners to secure land more speedily than the current Homestead and Dominion Lands Act. However, he was not in agreement with sending farming implements; in his opinion the Métis should not be treated differently than white settlers.<sup>246</sup> This letter displays the lack of categorization that the Métis had in the eyes of government—they were not white, yet they were not Indigenous either. Laird felt that they should receive land as long-term inhabitants of the land, like the First Nations, but that they should at the same time be treated like settlers. This ignored their important role in the establishing of the Fur Trade and the Crown's businesses in the district. These communications also demonstrate that local representatives of the federal government were more understanding of the concerns of the local residents than the agents who were situated back east. These communications show that at least some government representatives, like Laird, maintained a relationship of respect with the Métis and were working on their behalf.

The petitions also demonstrate a Métis understanding of both local and federal laws. They indicate knowledge about other treaties, agreements, and legislation established in similar situations and the St. Laurent Métis understood that these previous treaties, scrips, and provisions should help support their requests. The Métis used this knowledge as they crafted the petitions,

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<sup>245</sup> David Laird, "Letter to Minister of the Interior- Ottawa and Enclosed Petition," February 13, 1878, Department of the Interior, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

<sup>246</sup> David Mills, "Response to Laird Letter from Mills (Interior Minister)," February 3, 1878, Department of the Interior, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

drawing upon rhetoric that mimicked the legalese of the federal government. This strategy allowed for clearer transmission of their message. Petitions that discussed wanting to take on a more “civilized” lifestyle, for instance, were most likely used as a means to gain sympathy from agents and politicians that saw the buffalo hunt culture as inferior and a farming lifestyle as ideal. Furthermore, their petitions demonstrated that they wished to work with the government to prevent conflict.

The petitions also highlight the fact that Métis families, including the Dumont family, were connected over the vast area of what would become Saskatchewan. Dumont family members were named in petitions across the region. For example, Ekapow, who was one of the original founders of St. Laurent, was involved with the petition from the Cypress Hills community, likely because he had moved back to that region at the time of the petition. The Dumont family viewed all of the Saskatchewan territory from north to south and into the United States as their homelands. These intertwined communities advocated for their rights as long time inhabitants of the land, and a collective Métis nation. These were not the petitions of a violent community wanting to go to war with the government.

Finally, Gabriel Dumont’s involvement with the petitions displays that he was a leader and spokesperson for the Métis communities. The decision to ask Dumont to be the lead spokesperson in a follow up letter for the petition from the St. Laurent shows that when diplomatic approaches were needed, he was trusted to take the initiative. This construes his popular warrior image and builds upon other examples in this thesis that establish Dumont as a diplomat.

### Conflict

By 1884 Father André wrote that there was political agitation at St. Laurent. These Métis and others were frustrated with the lack of answers from the Canadian Government. The Métis and Father André were disappointed that while laws, which they felt applied to them, had been established, no tangible action to provide the promised patents had occurred. The petitions show a frustrated community who maintained a steady respectful tone in their interactions with the government.<sup>247</sup>

The North West Executive Council on August 2, 1879 resolved “in view of the fact that concession of land was made to the Métis of the province of Manitoba for extinction of the

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<sup>247</sup> André, “Petite Chronique de St. Laurent,” 59.



Indian rights that there will be great discontent amongst the Métis inhabiting the territories if they do not receive the same consideration.”<sup>248</sup> Yet it is clear from the petitions and letters that by 1883 the St. Laurent Métis, and other Métis communities, had not received any such patents to the land. They were still without the ability to gain legal title to the lands they had settled. The Land Act stated that it satisfied any claim arising out of Extinguishment of Indian Titles claimed by North-West Métis outside limits of Manitoba on July 15 1870. As well it established that land grants would be arranged in an expedient manner and the 1883 Act granted the same provisions.<sup>249</sup> Father André and the Métis at St. Laurent were frustrated that no surveys had occurred. The slowness in confirming title to the Métis, which André saw as a quasi-refusal to grant land to them, was the main reason for the tensions and discontent in the community. André stated in the *Chronique*:

“The great difficulty encountered by the Metis in obtaining land surveys in the first place in accordance with the present boundaries and form of these lands, the slowness in confirming their titles and the quasi refusal to grant them Asked for the extinction of their Indian rights, it is today the cause of all this discontent.

Several applications were lodged in Ottawa. Delegates were even sent to the capital at great expense, but nothing happened. Is there any other population in the other provinces that would have already revolted if they had undergone the same treatment? Certainly.”<sup>250</sup>

It is clear that Father André felt that the Métis were being more than patient in waiting for a response from the federal government.

Due to this lack of response, several assemblies within the St. Laurent community were held from April of 1884 onwards to demand justice and to draw the attention of the federal

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<sup>248</sup> André, “Petite Chronique de St. Laurent,” 59.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> This translation is my own. The original states: “La grande difficulté qu’éprouvent les Métis à obtenir d’abord l’arpentage de leurs terres conformément aux limites et à la forme actuelles de ces terres, la lenteur apportée à la confirmation de leurs titres et le quasi refus de leur accorder l’octroi demandé pour l’extinction de leurs droites Indiens, sont qu’aujourd’hui la cause de tout ce mécontentement. Plusieurs requêtes ont été adressées à Ottawa. Des délégués ont même été envoyés à la Capitale à grands frais et rien cependant n’arrive. Est-il une population dans aucune des autres provinces qui n’aurait pas déjà fait une révolution en règle, si elle subissait le même traitement? Non certainement.” ; Ibid., 60.

government.<sup>251</sup> At this first assembly the French Métis and English population met in St. Laurent and created several resolutions. They “demand that at least the same rights and privileges as the people in Manitoba, since the North-West is much more considerable because of its riches (resources) and the rest.”<sup>252</sup> They appointed three delegates to speak with Louis Riel “knowing that [he] made a bargain (negotiation) with the Government of Canada in 1870 wanting this meeting to be under the jurisdiction of the Manitoba Act ... have decided that a delegation be sent to Riel to consider the resolutions mentioned above so that we might be granted our just rights.”<sup>253</sup> By May of 1884 they decided to send a delegation of three people to “invite Riel to come among us, and to assure him an enthusiastic and sympathetic reception.”<sup>254</sup> The minutes do not discuss concerns over violence as had happened in the events leading up to the Manitoba Act in which Riel was involved. It is not clear from the meeting minutes why the community felt that Riel would be more successful than their current attempts, other than his success in the past negotiating with the federal government. The minutes also do not discuss Riel’s situation as an exiled person from Canada and how that would affect or help their future petitions.<sup>255</sup>

It is evident that the residents of St. Laurent, and much of what would become modern Saskatchewan, felt ignored by the federal government. Were their concerns that they were being ignored accurate? Was the government slow in settling the land claim requests on purpose? In a letter from the surveyor J.S. Dennis (23 February, 1878) to Captain Moore of the Prince Albert Settlement, Dennis acknowledges that he received the petition, which requested surveying of the land and issuing of scrip as in Manitoba. The petition was then forwarded to the Minister of the Interior the same day.<sup>256</sup> Despite this acknowledgement of the need to settle land claims six years previously, no titles were issued to the Métis. By 1881 Lawrence Clarke, member of the Council of the North-West Territories, said the land was mostly surveyed, however he stated that the onslaught of immigrants was preventing the previous settlers from receiving claims.<sup>257</sup> In July

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> “Minutes to a Meeting April 21 1884,” n.d., P5998/2, Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Louis Schmidt, “Meeting Minutes May 6 1884 at Lindsay School House,” n.d., P5998/2, Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

<sup>255</sup> “Minutes to a Meeting April 21 1884.”

<sup>256</sup> JS Dennis, “Letter from JS Dennis (Surveyor),” February 23, 1878, Department of the Interior, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

<sup>257</sup> L Clarke, “Copy of Memorial from Lawrence Clarke Esquire Member of the North-West Council to His Honor the Lieutenant Governor in Council,” June 7, 1881, Department of the Interior, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

1881, during discussions regarding land titles, Clarke was advocating with the earlier settlers of the land in regards to their obtaining land titles.

“That the fact of survey and the appointment of a resident Agent hastened the progress of the Country, immigrants arriving rapidly, while the earlier settlers, who had located in advance of the survey, but in hopes the publicly expressed statement of leading members of the Government that survey would be made, and provisions for carrying into effect the liberal assurances contained in the Dominion Lands Act would soon be realized...encouraged the people to improve their homesteads...”<sup>258</sup>

Clarke continued that due to the serious state of affairs that he respectfully recommended early action to “enable settlers to obtain, not only official recognition as provided for homesteads by the Dominion Lands act, but when proper settlement duties have been performed, titles for the lands they have converted from natural wilderness into well cultivated farms.”<sup>259</sup> Clarke also stated that despite Mr. Sprout being appointed as Registrar for deeds, no lands office was open to receive entries or making sales or any other method of obtaining land grants rendering him powerless.<sup>260</sup>

The Métis of the area felt that the office was needed to settle their claims; however the government appeared to be undecided on the issue and decided to proceed with opening an office for the Land Agent George Duck Esq.. The government agents felt that this office would allow Duck to handle the issue the Métis’ petitions, but refused to allow him to issue land titles to them, effectively preventing him from settling such claims.<sup>261</sup> In essence, the office was created with the appearance of being the government’s attempt to settle the petitioners’ requests for land, but was instead simply an ineffective step that created no results in settling the question of land title for the Métis.

There appears to have been some movement on the government’s behalf towards settling the issue of land titles. In a letter from surveyor A. Russel to land agent George Duck in August of 1881, Russel instructed Duck to prepare for the homesteading and sale of Dominion lands, changing his role from being in charge of supervising the land surveying to that of being in

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> JS Dennis, “Memo Re Land Office at Prince Albert,” July 22, 1881, Department, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

charge of issuing land titles.<sup>262</sup> It is not clear whether this meant that the Crown was planning to allow them to issue land to the original settlers such as the Métis, or if they were planning to instead just settle the land claims with incoming immigrants. Likely this change was a response to Clarke's previously mentioned recommendation. If the government made this move to bring answers to the Métis petitions, no communication was given to the Métis and other petitioners to notify them of this. Instead, the Métis were ignored, and not involved in the process, despite their continuous requests for information. It had been three years after these letters were sent and no scrips were issued to the petitioners. It is not inconceivable then, that this lag in time is an indication that the Crown did not place these claims as a priority, or perhaps that they had no plan to ever respond with land titles for the Métis. It was at this point, with no other strategy in sight and at the encouragement of Louis Riel, that the St. Laurent Métis, under the leadership of Gabriel Dumont, took up arms and went to war.

### Conclusion

This chapter has examined the foundations of St. Laurent de Grandin, a Métis community developed by members of the Dumont family and those associated with them. Through this community the transition from a hunting society to agrarian society can be investigated. St. Laurent was not unusual, but instead one of several former *hivernant* communities in the region who were transitioning through the same lifestyle changes and were all advocating for rights. The Métis, recognizing that this change would not be successful without legal title for the land, especially as immigrants began to settle, wrote petitions to the federal government for scrips. These petitions demonstrate that the Métis, including Dumont, approached the government with diplomacy and aims of peaceful reconciliation. They were aware of the events, treaties, and rights that had been awarded to other groups and only wished to obtain similar agreements.

Gabriel Dumont, through the establishment of St. Laurent, his role as President, and the written petitions to the government, acted as a diplomat on the community's behalf. Far from an immediate call to battle in order to solve the issues facing St. Laurent, Dumont continuously sought strategies that would avoid conflict before 1885. It was only after a lifetime of diplomacy and in response to his community's desperate needs, and an approaching armed federal regiment that Dumont agreed to take up arms.

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<sup>262</sup> A Russel, "Letter from A Russel Surveyor to George Duck Esq Lands Agent Prince Albert," August 2, 1881, Department of the Interior, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

### **Conclusion – More Than a Warrior**

The man imagined by the Canadian militia who scouted for the elusive warrior Gabriel Dumont in 1885 is still clearly portrayed in current scholarship on the Métis, The North-West Resistance and Canadian history in general. Often compared to the intellectual and politician Louis Riel, Dumont's historical significance is relegated to his strength as a marksman and military leader. Slowly, however, more stories of Dumont's nuanced contributions to Métis society are being written. Biographer George Woodcock states for instance in his 1975 publication that Dumont had:

“all the qualities of the kind of folk or frontier hero who is contemporary equivalent to the great braggart warriors of Homer or Shakespeare; in the United States he would have acquired a legendary status. As long as the buffalo lasted, he was the greatest of the Métis hunters, and few Indians of any nation knew more than he did of the lore of the wilderness. If he was virtually illiterate, he had the kind of intelligence and knowledge that knows little need of books.”<sup>263</sup>

Dumont was to Woodcock the natural man par excellence in comparison to Riel who was as “any modern Canadian from that existence.”<sup>264</sup> Riel was in Woodcock's opinion not Métis in the same way that Dumont was, even going so far as to question why it was Riel that became the beacon of Métis leadership and not Dumont. Still, Woodcock cannot avoid the warrior savage rendition of Dumont as he further includes the assertion that Dumont needed Riel in the 1885 Resistance because he was “an illiterate son of nature, however efficient in his own world, [who] could not compete in the ambiance of legalities and petitions.”<sup>265</sup>

This thesis goes further than Woodcock and explicitly argues that Dumont's contributions to Métis society, much like Louis Riel's, were diplomatic in nature.

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<sup>263</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont : The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, 11.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 13.

Dumont's life demonstrates a long history of Métis leadership that was grounded in kinship ties, international diplomacy, and community building based on Métis styles of governance.

Kinship and leadership were closely connected and this is demonstrated through the Dumont family. The term *wahkootowin*, meaning to belong to one another, exhibits that many Aboriginal peoples interacted between relatives and non-relatives. Community was considered more important than the individual. The first generation of the Dumont family highlights the beginning of *wahkootowin* practices. Marriage incorporates and creates citizenry and was a vehicle within the Métis network system. The marriages of the Dumont family created bonds between families, enforcing unique Métis values and societal structures including leadership. The three generations of the Dumont family, the marriages and children of the family all embraced *wahkootowin* concepts of leadership and as such kinship was a crucial component to leadership and Métis society.

Dumont's kinship networks and leadership roles led to numerous opportunities for diplomatic ventures. His involvement in the 1862 Treaty with the Dakota Sioux, for instance, once contextualized with the often overlooked source, the oral history of Gregoire Monette, demonstrates Dumont's important role in the 1862 treaty with the Dakota Sioux. Dumont understood his reputation as a warrior even at that young age, however his actions indicated his want to see peace and to create allies rather than conflict. The Dumont family was also involved with negotiations and the signing of Treaty 6. Although many of the specific details have been lost, Dumont was present during these events and his father, Ekapow, acted as signatory. This kind of diplomacy illustrates the active participation of Métis leaders to avoid warfare, not instigate it. Indeed, records highlight that Dumont specifically chose diplomacy over war, as shown in his own memoir when he chose to create allies through the use of the pipe rather than injure a Gros-Ventre man who was commonly an enemy of Dumont's people creating an ally that would then be involved with the 1862 treaty.

Finally, Dumont's kinship ties and diplomacy helped position himself as a leader within the establishment of the St. Laurent de Grandin community. This community, modeled after the less permanent *hivernant* camps that preceded it, is a case study of the process of community building as the Métis navigated the transition from the more

nomadic buffalo hunt society to one more dependent on agriculture. In St. Laurent, Dumont established himself not only as a political leader, but also as a successful businessman, who worked with — not against— the Canadian government. Further, the petitions brought forth by the residents of St. Laurent and other communities between 1878 and 1884 in what would become modern Saskatchewan demonstrate that Dumont attempted to work with the federal government and avoid conflict. Community was at the forefront of these initiatives and how best to protect and preserve Métis culture and society during this tumultuous period.

In the end, the history of Gabriel Dumont, from his ancestors such as Jean-Baptiste Dumont to the period leading up to the 1885 North-West Resistance reveals a more complex portrait of this important leader, arguing against the one dimensional warrior stereotype. Rather, through the prisms of kinship, diplomacy and community, we come to understand Dumont's significance before and beyond the battlefield.

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